Report

Housing conditionality, Indigenous lifeworlds and policy outcomes

Mt Isa case study

authored by

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AHURi

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACRONYMS

ABS	Australia Bureau of Statistics
A/C	Air-conditioner
AERC	Aboriginal Environments Research Centre
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
APSCC	Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre
ASAP	As soon as possible
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
ATOD	Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
BAS	Queensland Building and Asset Services
BR	Bedroom
CDEP	(the former) Community Development Employment Programme
DAIA	(the former) Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs (Queensland)
DATSIMA	Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs (C'th)
DHPW	Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works
DoC	Department of Communities (Queensland)
DoCS	Department of Community Services (Queensland)
DOH	(the former) Department of Housing (Queensland)
DV	Domestic Violence
HSC	Housing Service Centre
IBA	Indigenous Business Australia
ICHO	Indigenous Community Housing Organisation
ICM	Integrated Case Management
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
IMYRP	Indigenous Multi-Year Research Project
ISD	Indigenous Service Delivery
JTHC	Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre
KASH	Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House
KPI	Key performance indicator
MI	Mornington Island
MP	Member of Parliament
nd	Not dated
NGO	Non-Government Organisation

NPARIH	National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing
NT	Northern Territory
NWQ	North-west Queensland
NWQICSS	North-west Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services
QDHPW	See DHPW
QHPW	Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works
RFDS	Royal Flying Doctor Service
RJCP	Remote Jobs Community Program
R&M	Repairs and maintenance
RTA	Residential Tenancies Act
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TO	Traditional Owner (Aboriginal Traditional Owner of land)
WA	Western Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mt Isa case study report focuses on the housing conditionality, lifeworlds and policy outcomes for Indigenous social housing tenants in the remote, urban location of Mt Isa. The primary aim of the Indigenous Multi-Year Research Project (IMYRP) case study was to explore the perspectives of Indigenous social housing tenants, government and Indigenous or intermediary organisations around housing conditionalities, in order to identify good practice and policy principles that promote positive housing outcomes. A total of 30 in-depth structured interviews were completed, including six state government Housing Officers in the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre of the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW). Also interviewed were 24 Aboriginal tenants who were already in, or waiting to go into, state government rental social housing.

Tenant perspectives

Aboriginal tenants who were having the most difficulty with achieving or sustaining tenancies in government housing were disadvantaged due to: lack of education, limited access to employment and constraints within their social behaviour, including obligations to visiting kin. Most interviewees were recipients of welfare payments, without jobs and other forms of social capital and they had little opportunity to move out of their current rental housing. Opportunities were further curtailed by the much higher and fixed-price private rentals in the two-speed Mt Isa economy. Home ownership was not a strong or even moderate theme in responses.

Aboriginal migration and circular mobility in Mt Isa from regional and remote communities has exacerbated many social problems in the town. Most tenants considered the rules were getting 'tighter', and that the most difficult to meet related to the anti-social behaviour (ASB) of their visitors, both in terms of excessive unapproved numbers and engaging in anti-social behaviour which violated the rules. More than half of the tenants referred to the Aboriginal custom of taking in visitors as a necessary and unavoidable cultural responsibility. However, most tenants were also of the view that family members were helping with meeting the housing rules indicating a significant degree of social capital.

Tenant agency was expressed in several important ways. Some tenants, particularly those who came through the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Homelessness Centre, needed to reform their own lifestyles first in order to achieve their well-being goals. A substantial number of tenants perceived housing to be essential to achieve their lifeworld goals around the well-being of their children. A number also emphasised the role of housing in conjunction with their ability to achieve a sense of independence, stability and/or peace for their households.

High variability between tenant contexts means that no one-rule system can be said to be highly successful or non-successful—rather, there are mixed responses and impacts. This indicates the necessity of flexibility in housing management approaches.

Housing Officers perspectives

The six Housing Officers were unanimous that the rules of housing conditionality were getting tighter, (as were 18 of the 24 tenants). They were all of the view that they were helping tenants to meet the housing rules.

A serious constraint was the state of neighbourhood crowding (notwithstanding household crowding) in the suburb of Pioneer, characterised by a relatively high density of rental housing occupied by Aboriginal people exacerbated by high visitation

numbers, family violence, alcohol-fuelled behaviour and forms of anti-social street behaviour impinging on and de-stabilising tenancies. Nevertheless, the suburb of Pioneer was a site of high Aboriginal social capital, but also a site where social capital was abused and violated when intoxicated people took advantage of the norms of tenant hospitality. Staff had implemented various interventions to increase house pride. However Aboriginal people in Pioneer sometimes accused them of putting too many people in the suburb. Some tenants with children were attempting to avoid placement in Pioneer or trying to move elsewhere.

The agency of Housing Officers was critical in determining how well the rules were working for tenants and proved to be an enabling influence at times. While the majority of Indigenous tenants tried to abide by the rules, many require individual supports; for example need for critical information on rules and practical advice, such as on cleaning services. The Officers also saw this as a communication strategy, understanding that it can be an effective way to build trust between tenants and government. Agency of Housing Officers was demonstrated by their moving of tenants to dismantle social conflicts and family violence, and in initiating a number of strategies to support tenants during key periods when their visitor numbers peaked and their tenancies thereby become vulnerable. Housing Officers all recognised flexibility as a key principle in interpreting and applying the rules of tenancy.

During the early period of the IMYRP project in Mt Isa, social capital was building between various government and non-government agencies (e.g. at Interagency Case Management meetings), seeking solutions for clients by conscripting assistance from or referring to other agencies. Within these networks, the presence of local Aboriginal staff in other agencies provided powerful voices in the recognition space. Conscripting and training of Aboriginal Housing Officers (DHOs) for suitable roles in Mt Isa may be one potential area for developing more effective tenant-management relationships.

Intermediary organisation perspectives

The number and capacity of Indigenous community housing organisations (ICHOs) in Mt Isa has become limited and there was no dedicated Indigenous housing management organisation operating effectively at the time of our study.

However, the Jimaylya Centre presents a special case due to its internal Indigenous management and staffing that persuades us to deal with it as an ICHO, even though it is within a government department. Jimaylya provides homeless people with safe shelter, a managed drinking program, training in positive tenancy behaviour and then accommodation leading to housing, as well as the building of social capital and resilience. Organisational constraints for Jimaylya include the lack of available rental housing for clients ready to transition and a proportion of clients who 'fall through the cracks', 'recycling' through homelessness again and back into the Centre. The agency of the Jimaylya staff involves implementing techniques to achieve outreach to homeless clients, as well as the post-Jimaylya services of visiting and counselling clients. The capacity of the Jimaylya Centre to influence its clients through behavioural change to their lifestyles and the gaining of knowledge on housing conditionality are important positive services in the Mt Isa housing sector.

At the conclusion of our IMYRP project, a new Indigenous corporation, the Myuma Group (through its Rainbow Gateway Limited), was commencing engagement in the Mt Isa housing environment through its innovative collaborative partnership with DHPW. It has most recently commenced providing a repairs and maintenance (R&M) service for DHPW stock in Mt Isa, with an intention to extend into the rural towns of North-west Queensland. This recent pro-active engagement by the Myuma Group, forging a new partnership with DHPW and TAFE,brings a new chapter in Aboriginal

housing management after the demise of many of the old Housing Co-ops that were established in the 1970s and 80s.

Enhancing the recognition space

Our findings suggested that there were some significant constraints and enabling influences on the recognition space. In particular, the lack of available and affordable housing in Mt Isa was critical to the success of service delivery to the most vulnerable tenants. Furthermore, the 'Three Strikes Policy' had started in DHPW just prior to the commencement of the project, and a degree of frustration existed amongst DHPW staff and tenants about the changing policy landscape and its implications. On the other hand, the attempts at a flexible tenancy management approach by DHOs and the enabling impacts of informal Aboriginal social capital should not be underestimated.

Our findings also suggested that there is a disjunction not only between the views within the Mt Isa DHPW Housing office but also amongst Indigenous social housing tenants about the tenancy rules and their implementation. At the same time, the DHOs and the tenants recognised ways to build communication and capacity that draw on the knowledge and goodwill of DHOs and the agency of Indigenous tenants. It is also clear that the most effective engagement would involve the acknowledgement of the many issues relating to Indigenous disadvantage, not only housing needs. With this understanding it seems that collaboration between the DHPW and two local Indigenous entities (the Jimaylya Centre and Myuma) is, at the time of this study, leading the way towards an enhanced recognition space. The following 12 recommendations aim to address the many issues raised in this report that are critical to achieving the most effective housing outcomes for Indigenous people in the Mt Isa region.

Recommendations

1. *Overcoming disparities of views in the recognition space*: it is recommended that DHPW develop a unified and clear mission statement on social housing, as adapted for local conditions. This will be presented to tenants in Mt Isa by the Housing Officers; and seize opportunities for effective communication during day-to-day practice to prevent perceived imbalances in responsibilities and reciprocities arising between Housing Officers and tenants.

2. *Maintenance of a flexible approach to housing management*: to enable adaptation to the transforming imposed conditionalities in resolving local tenancy problems in accordance with the realities of regional socio-economic parameters.

3. *Use of informal Aboriginal social capital*: to build on the value of kinship and extended family relationships in providing residential support, a significant form of Aboriginal social capital. Also to involve ongoing 'community' and tenants' meetings on tenancy issues, fostering Aboriginal leadership, supporting successful tenants as role models and building a neighbourhood watch ideology amongst tenants.

4. *Communication strategy to improve the agency of all key parties*: Housing Officers need to be reflexive about the style of verbal communication that they use with tenants, to improve understandings of conditionality. This will ensure a caring and respectful approach, supported by cultural training and advisory service for Housing Officers when necessary; and noting tenant preference for face-to-face contact to talk through tenancy issues in order to find equitable solutions. Communication will also be assisted by maintaining Aboriginal staff in the Housing Office.

5. *The generation of social capital in the recognition space through inter-agency and tenants' meetings*: by maintaining Integrated Case Management meetings, including participation of Aboriginal staff; also re-instalment of Departmental budget to facilitate housing tenancy meetings in rural towns.

6. *Jimaylya as a focus for tenancy support*: maintain Jimaylya's critically important role in opening up and generating the recognition space, such as use for housing tenancy meetings; also improved client programs (TAFE, emotional and well-being) and a tracking programme for clients into mainstream rental housing.

7. *Educational support programs on home skills and parenting*: to respond to tenants' needs for house skills training (see range of suggestions for courses).

8. *Recognition of externally oriented behaviour as an aspect of Aboriginal lifestyle and appropriate design for such*: DHPW to support its tenants in creating more environmentally appropriate external living spaces (e.g. verandas, cooking areas etc.), which could be connected to the Myuma R&M/construction team initiatives.

9. *Sustainable yard landscaping strategy*: an 'arid landscaping' design approach for external lifestyle.

10. *Pioneer social and urban planning strategy*: a new Strategy for Pioneer to supplement the DHPW reduction of the Aboriginal rental housing density.

11. *Maintain Myuma and DHPW/TAFE collaborative initiatives and promote home ownership*: foster the innovative economic venture implemented between the Housing Office, the local TAFE, Queensland Building Asset Services (BAS) and the Myuma Group (Rainbow Gateway), to train local Aboriginal adults to carry out housing R&M, and develop option to buy one of the rental stock houses.

12. *Create more diversity of housing stock*: campaign for more housing stock in Mt Isa to suit large extended families as well as for special needs groups.

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Case study overview and aims

The Mt Isa case study report focuses on the housing conditionality, lifeworlds and policy outcomes for Indigenous social housing tenants in a remote, urban location in north-west Queensland as well as some supplementary findings in other small centres within this region (see Figure 1). Together with four other case studies including Logan and Palm Island in Queensland, Tenant Creek in the Northern Territory and the Goldfields region of Western Australia, this report contributes significantly to the diversity of sites in the AHURI funded Indigenous Multi-Year Research Project (IMYRP).

As for the other IMYRP case studies, the primary aims of the Mt Isa case study were to explore the perspectives of Indigenous social housing tenants, government and Indigenous organisations in relation to conditionalities, in order to identify good practice and policy principles that promote positive housing outcomes. At an analytical level, the study also aimed to contribute a better understanding of the recognition space in which these perspectives coexisted.

Four overarching research questions were set out to guide the IMYRP case studies. These questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of different types of housing conditionality and how effective are they in achieving positive housing outcomes for Indigenous people?

2. How does the intersection between these types of housing conditionality, and Indigenous lifeworlds and Indigenous governance arrangements influence housing outcomes for Indigenous people?

3. Is there an identifiable form of conditionality that enables a recognition space permitting shared understanding of the values and constraints of government workers, Indigenous tenants, housing managers and community leaders? What are the conditions of its emergence, and to what extent does it support improvements in Indigenous housing?

4. Are there identifiable good practice and policy principles that can be elicited from this analysis and have specific use in particular contexts or that are useful across all contexts?

Figure 1: Map of Queensland showing jurisdiction of Mt Isa Area Office of DHPW; also showing Alpurrurulam in the NT across the border
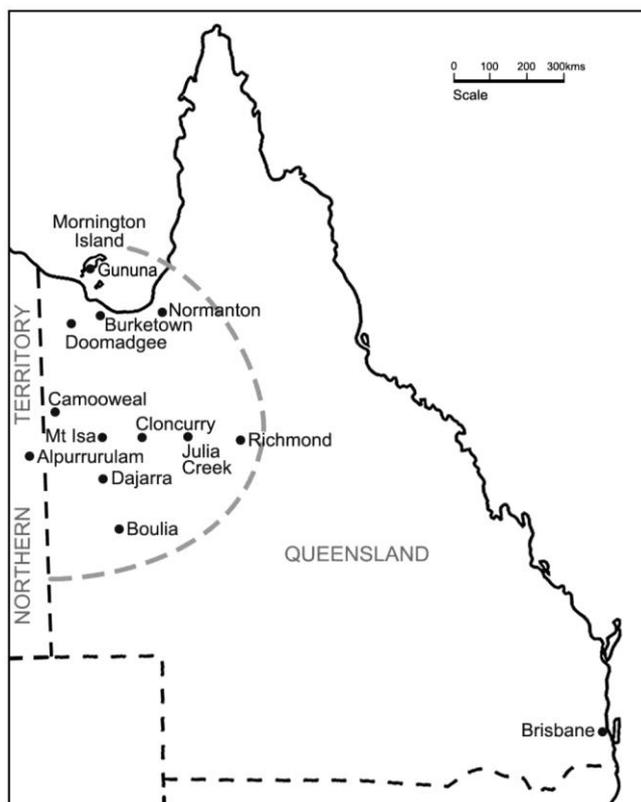
1.2 Case study method

Tenants and 'frontline' housing tenancy officers were interviewed using the customised IMYRP survey instrument comprising 22 questions (see Appendix 1). The interviews took place in short but intense periods between October 2013 and August 2014 and were carried out by Paul Memmott and Daphne Nash. A total of 30 in-depth structured interviews were completed. Six of these were with state government Housing Officers in the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre (formerly called the 'Area Office') of the Housing Branch of Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works (QDHPW), and 24 were with Aboriginal tenants who were all in, or waiting to go into, state government rental social housing. Of these 24, 18 were already tenants, two were in Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre for the homeless and four were in Ngurri Ngurri Women's Refuge. These last six were all on the waiting list for rental housing and eligible for a 'fast-tracked' position on the waiting list due to their at-risk circumstances. They had all been tenants or members of households in public rental housing. Only two young single mothers were inexperienced at being the lead tenant. Of the 24 tenant interviews, seven were with men, 14 with women and three were with partnered couples. Of the six Housing Officer interviews, five were with women and one with a man (none of them were Indigenous). The responses of each interviewee quoted in this case study report has been given a code (e.g. ISA 23) for de-identification purposes.

Other participants were involved in semi-structured interviews based on various themes from the IMYRP questionnaire. These included some earlier semi-structured interviews, which were held with senior staff of the Mt Isa DHPW Area Office in preparing for and designing the project (e.g. A.W. 6 March 2012, B.S. 24 May 13), as well as some further open-ended discussion with them through the life of the project.

A Crowding Workshop was also held with seven female (white) DHPW Housing Officer in Mt Isa, 1 August 2013 in the planning period of the project, based on findings from an earlier but recent research project on house and neighbourhood crowding in Mt Isa (Memmott et al. 2012), but which yielded useful findings for this current project.

The manager and deputy manager of the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Homelessness Centre made a significant contribution to the project including the compiling of a list of ten couples (formerly homeless) who had moved into town houses for potential interviewing (22 October 2013); a total of four Jimaylya clients were interviewed. Another Housing Officer workshop on the project progress was held on 14 August 2014.

Table 1: Public housing stock of the north-west Queensland region at the completion of the interview period (30 October 2014), together with details of Housing Officer interviewees

Population centre	No. of Stock	Teams of Housing Officers	Housing Officer interviews
Mt Isa	597	City Team covers most suburbs in Mt Isa.	Isa 1,2,3,5
Cloncurry	59		
Dajarra	19		
Boulia	26		
Camooweal	36	Country team covers rural towns, plus Mt Isa suburbs of Happy Valley, Sunset, Soldiers Hill.	Isa 4
Burketown			
Normanton	105		
Julia Creek	13		
Richmond	22		
Mornington Island	211	Remote team covers the two discrete communities	Isa 13
Doomadgee	210		
Subtotal	1,323		
Gen	120		
Total	*1,443*		

Source: Mt Isa HSC, DHPW, internal statistics

2   CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The north-west region

Mt Isa is the regional centre for all of North-west Queensland (NWQ) attracting many people both permanently and temporarily. The rental housing in the region's various small rural towns are largely serviced from the Mt Isa office of the DHPW. A brief regional overview is therefore necessary. For the first three-quarters of the 20th century, Aboriginal movement in the region was strongly constrained by the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* and the various successive revised 'Aboriginal Acts', which all empowered state control over Aboriginal labour and movement. This was mainly for the pastoral industry and administered by the local agents of the state, either policemen in rural towns or missionaries on Aboriginal Reserves. The rural towns of the region in the early 20th century were Cloncurry (regional centre), Camooweal, Boulia, Duchess, Burketown, and Normanton. They were joined in the early 1920s by the establishment of Dajarra which took over the role of western railhead (from Duchess) to receive NT and WA cattle in c1920, and by Mt Isa where a mineral boom started in 1924. Mt Isa had eclipsed Cloncurry as the regional centre by the 1950s. The two Aboriginal settlements that were originally formed as Missions are Mornington Island (1914), which is now named Gununa, and Doomadgee (1931). Another formal settlement of the region that had emerged by the 1990s, albeit just over the border in the NT was Alpurrurulam, which had been a pastoral camp since the late 1800s.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s the various legislative controls over the lives of the region's Aboriginal people broke down. Welfare support was introduced (old age and sickness pensions, unemployment and supporting mothers' benefits). As people exited from 'the Aboriginal Act', second hand cars were purchased and regional travel increased. As the regional centre, Mt Isa had generated an Aboriginal 'fringe camp', which was formalised as a 'Reserve' and is now known as Yallambee, and contains conventional rental housing. In the early 1970s it displayed a distinct socio-spatial camping structure reflecting the visitor groups from the rural towns and missions. The administrating State Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs (DAIA) had officers and facilities on a nearby piece of land on Duchess Road. This was eventually handed over as a site for the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre for homeless people in 2003.

Aboriginal tribal groups from throughout NWQ were represented in the Yallambee Camp in the 1970s and are still strongly identifiable within Mt Isa residential patterns. With increased travel and incomes, they have been joined by east coast Aboriginal visitors (including from Palm Island, Townsville, Rockhampton, Woorabinda) and NT visitors from Alpurrurulam, Tennant Creek and other remote communities on the Sandover and Plenty River Basins. The binge drinking style of the pastoral worker in Mt Isa's many hotels gradually disappeared in the latter part of the 20th century and the number of hotels reduced. Today Mt Isa contains four hotels but most of these, as well as licensed clubs, exclude any Aboriginal people who attempt to indulge in the binge drinking style described previously. They must drink at relatives' houses or in public places particularly in the (usually) dry bed of the Leichhardt River, the most common venue for camping or 'public place dwelling' as we refer to it. The travel patterns of individuals and groups cycling into Mt Isa from the outer parts of the region (and beyond) have been termed 'beats' by Memmott et al. (2006) in their regional mobility study (see map by Long in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Map of the 'beats' or circular mobility of the North-west Queensland/Northern Territory border region people into Mt Isa, and showing the origins of most of the tenants in social housing and the clients at the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre for the homeless
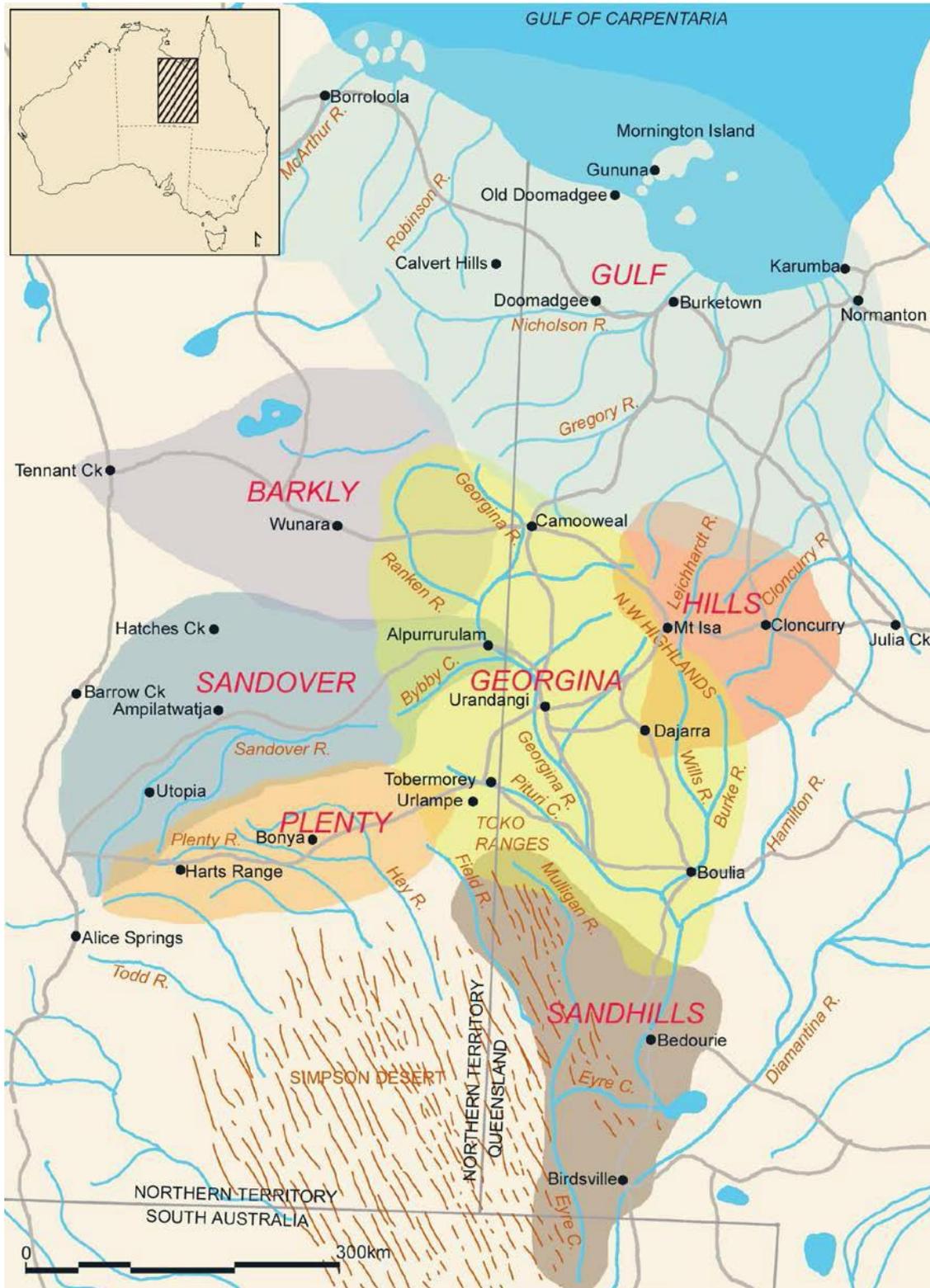
Source: Long 2005, p.359

Figure 3: Mt Isa's named suburbs and Census Collection Districts, coloured according to % of Indigenous population. Note high density of Indigenous people in Pioneer
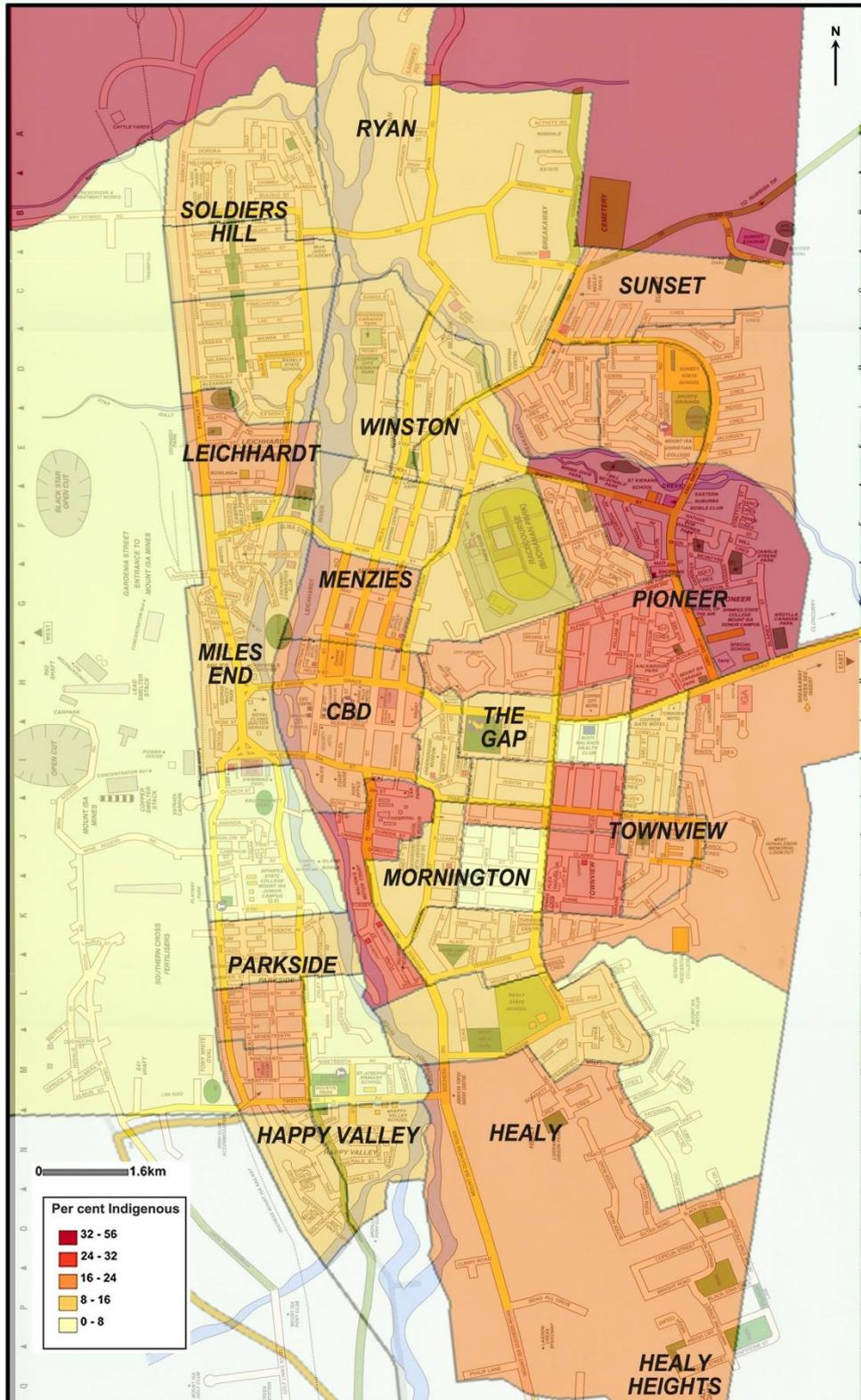
Source: AERC Archives

Figure 4: The suburb of Pioneer in Mt Isa. Red dotted line indicates the Pioneer housing precinct which contains a high density of public rental housing stock
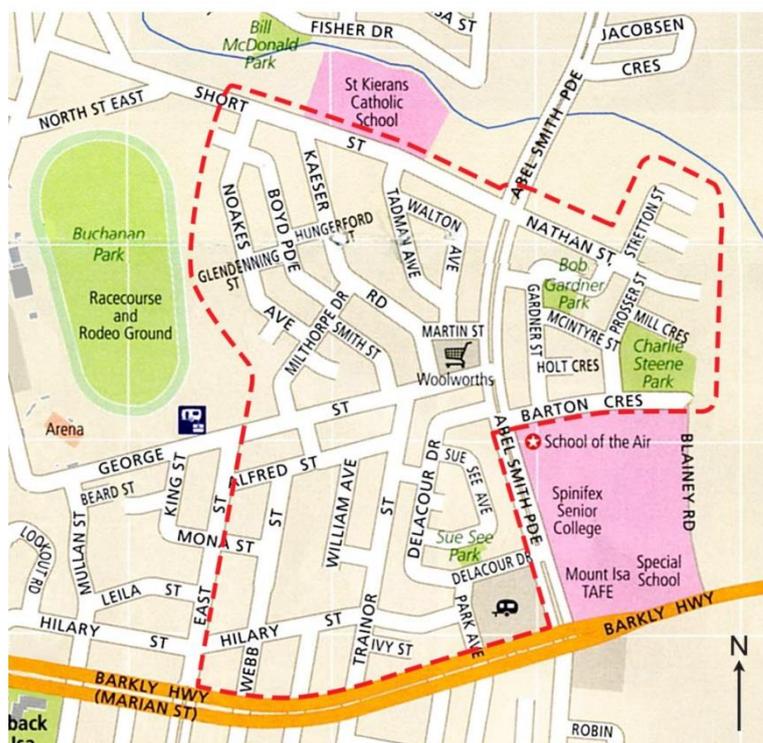
Table 2: Population comparison in the north-west Queensland region between 2001 and 2011

Population centres	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Mt Isa	3,048	3,071	17,321	17,499	20,369	20,570
Cloncurry	592	536	2139	1,777	2,731	2,313
Dajarra	163	155	21	279	184	434
Boulia	122	121	166	110	288	231
Camooweal	121	104	115	83	236	187
Burketown	74	84	150	118	224	202
Normanton	786	669	650	545	1,436	1,214
Julia Creek	44	22	462	612	506	634
Richmond	35	37	985	485	1,020	522
Mornington Is (Gununa)	742	1000	102	126	844	1126
Doomadgee	981	1,168	130	90	1,111	1,258
Totals	*6,708*	*6,967*	*22,241*	*21,724*	*28,949*	*28,691*

Source: ABS data, 2001 Census Quickstats and 2011 Census Quickstats.

Aboriginal lifeworlds

Most Aboriginal people living in the Mt Isa today are part of a much wider cultural group, which relates to many other places in the region. Many people maintain their

connections to those places and the people there. As Mt Isa is a regional centre, people from the surrounding region travel there to access a range of services, such as visiting relatives and other social reasons (e.g. funerals, football). As a result, those people who live in public housing in Mt Isa may have frequent requests for accommodation from visiting relatives. For many households this is a constant pressure and because of their cultural obligations they prefer to manage a crowded house rather than turn away kin. Cultural attitudes of kin towards the use of the house and yard as well as their maintenance can result in difficulties around their tenancy obligations. Some tenants are unable to control the behaviour of visitors (who may be drinking or partying excessively) and may also not be motivated to maintain the house-yard according to the dominant social norms in Mt Isa. The impacts of circular mobility in the region, and visitors coming into Mt Isa, will be expanded later in Section 3.1.

Despite the high circular mobility, Table 1 on population comparison indicates that population have stayed fairly constant across the region with the greatest gains in the old Mission settlements (Gununa 34%, Doomadgee 19%) and slight losses across most rural small towns with the exception of Richmond (50% loss). Indigenous people continue to comprise about 15 per cent of the Mt Isa population according to the 2011 Census (or 3071 people in a total city population of 20 570).

2.1 Housing situation in Mt Isa and wider region

Special stock of rental housing for Aboriginal people was established in Mt Isa from the 1970s, which has since been integrated with the mainstream rental stock. Supply of stock has not been able to meet demand with lengthy waitlists for such housing, a situation exacerbated by the periodic upturns in the mining industry with 'two speed' economic conditions whereby private rental housing commands high prices for mining personnel which are unattainable for low-income Aboriginal families many of whom are welfare dependent. The Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre for the homeless is often relatively full with 50 or so people, and the Leichhardt River drinking camps continue to operate.

2.1.1 The issue of Pioneer

Pioneer (see Figures 3 and 4 for location) is a problematic suburb of Mt Isa with the highest Aboriginal population density and both household and neighbourhood crowding but nevertheless some high under-occupation due to damaged housing under repair or up for sale. There is also a problem of intoxicated gangs of youths de-stabilising tenancies through a range of anti-social behaviour that impact directly on houses and households (intoxicated noise, physical and economic violence, house damage) or on the neighbourhood (e.g. late-night street gangs, rock throwing, chroming, petrol sniffing, petty crime, public place defecation and socially inappropriate sex). Altogether these factors have exacerbated the problem of insufficient public housing for low-income families, especially for Aboriginal people.

Some of the social problems in Pioneer (or 'the Bronx' as it is facetiously known as by locals) are captured in this quote from the Area Manager of the Housing Office:

> People are drinking and wandering in public spaces: youth are out as late as midnight and 2am, but we can't verify where all these street kids are coming from; some rock throwing going on too. There is one group who gather, but who don't commit crime, and who are locals. Another group is into chroming, sniffing petrol. Some are changing clothes to confuse witnesses. On one vacant block, we found condoms, used sanitary towels, and faeces. One property vandalised—but several are not. We get numerous complaints from

tenants and people wanting to transfer out. And a recent report on Pioneer is saying 43 per cent homes are under occupied. (B.S. 24 May 13)

At the time of the commencement of our study there were six vacant houses for sale in Pioneer, two houses empty and vandalised, and one house boarded up secure (A.W. 31 July 2013).

2.1.2 Summary of ICHOs

The number and capacity of Indigenous organisations in Mt Isa has declined and become very limited, and there were no dedicated Indigenous housing management organisations operating effectively at the time of our study. The Kalkadoon Tribal Council had gone into receivership and so their plans for building social housing on their traditional land had not eventuated. Also, no Elders group had actively operated in Mt Isa for some years limiting advocacy for the Indigenous community. No strong ICHOs' perspectives can thus be given in this Report, as none were operating as such in Mt Isa during the period of the research.

There were, however, two other agencies operating however that we chose to profile. One was the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre, which presented a special case due to its internal Indigenous management and staffing that persuaded us to deal with it as a type of ICHO. It provides a transitional accommodation, educational and counselling program for the homeless and the majority of clients are Indigenous. At the conclusion of our IMYRP project, a new Indigenous corporation, the Myuma Group, was commencing engagement in the Mt Isa housing environment through its innovative collaborative partnership with QHPW around executing repairs and maintenance (R&M) on QHPW housing stock. Thus it was also profiled to some extent.

2.2 The policy landscape in Mt Isa

The lack of available and affordable housing in Mt Isa impacts on the community in a range of significant ways. This is significant as these factors are critical to the success of service delivery to the most vulnerable tenants; for example, tenants in transitional housing (e.g. Jimaylya) who are ready to move to DHPW tenancies yet are unable to do so. Clients ready for transitional housing are justifiably frustrated by the lack of transitional housing places.

The 'Three Strikes Policy' had started in DHPW just prior to the commencement of the project in Mt Isa, on 1 July 2013, in order to address anti-social behaviour defined as that 'which may or is likely to disturb the peace, comfort or privacy of other tenants or neighbours or any other person living in the vicinity of the premises and surrounding community'. A four-page fact sheet by the Department was prepared for distribution to tenants, which stated:

> Where tenants engage in unacceptable behaviour and receive three strikes against their tenancy within a 12-month period, the department will take action to end their tenancy and exit the tenant from the public housing property. Where a tenants' behaviour is considered to be 'dangerous or severe', the department will issue a first and final strike notice to the tenant and take immediate action to end the tenancy. (Queensland, DHPW 2013)

At the commencement of the IMYRP project, Housing Officers in Mt Isa were expecting a challenge in administrating this policy, noting that there were current tenants who had rented for two or three years with the equivalent of what would amount to six strikes already. In general, DHPW staff were frustrated by the changing policy landscape and its implications for their dealings with tenants and also their workloads. DHPW officers were cautious in communicating some aspects of policy to

tenants; such as the end of their lease, which was at the time a maximum of three years.

There was another set of conditionalities imposed by the Jimaylya Centre, the transitional accommodation centre through which homeless people transit into rental housing. Requirements included undertaking of TAFE training courses and behavioural and drinking rules in Jimaylya houses.

2.3 Conditionalities in practice

Prior to mid-2013, the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre (HSC) of DHPW had been tightening the rules and was introducing a combination of strategies to implement the 'three strikes' policy incorporating the rules about anti-social behaviour. Different rules once applied to Indigenous housing though they were now all aligned in the 'mainstream' model. The high variability between the circumstances of Indigenous tenants, however, meant that no one rule system or approach could be fully successful, resulting in mixed responses and impacts. This necessitated flexibility in the housing management approach based on local circumstances.

2.3.1 Housing Officers knowledge of the housing conditionalities

The staff of DHPW (hereafter Housing Officers) who were interviewed for this project demonstrated how aspects of policy are implemented through day-to-day practice of the tenancy rules. Question 1 asked the six Housing Officers: 'What are the rules that tenants have to follow for their house?' In response to this question the Housing Officers tended to cite the specific source documents for the rules. For example:

> The RTA or Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 and the Housing Act 2003. The Acts convert to policy that is in line with the Acts, but the policy comes from Head Office. (Isa 2)

> See the Anti-Social Behaviour [ASB] fact sheet, and the Tenancy Agreement. They contain two sets of rules with some overlap. (Isa 1)

Isa 13 mentioned the process of unpacking the rules: 'we use our check list and hand out our 'fact sheets', and explain their obligations and our obligations' (Isa 13). Regarding individual rules, the housing staff provided consensus answers around the following three rule sets in this process of 'unpacking', which they carried out on a regular basis for tenants:

1. Pay rent regularly on time and keep two weeks in credit, with rent based on 25 per cent of assessable household income.

2. Look after and do not damage the house.

3. Do not disturb or cause nuisance to neighbours; show respect and show no anti-social behaviour (ASB) towards neighbours.

Four other rules were elicited, albeit once only from an individual Housing Officer:

1. 'Failing to reside'—where the tenant has left the house and fails to reside in the house for a period of time (Isa 2).

2. Tenant declaration of the people living in the house (Isa 4), that is notifying Department of Housing when there is a change to the composition of the household in residence.

3. Keeping the amenities connected (Isa 3).

4. Committing a serious offence result in being given notice to leave straight away such as drug labs or supply, severe assault, or severe wilful damage (Isa 4).

Some passing references were also made to the 'three strikes' rule which was introduced on 1 July 2013. For example, a 'strike' occurs when wilful damage is incurred to the house. 'If three "strikes" in a 12-month period, they can be asked to leave' (Isa 4). However, this rule was not emphasised in the early part of the interview by the interviewees. Nevertheless, at the onset of the study, one Housing Officer stated: 'the knowledge of 'three strikes' is the biggest issue … to make tenants understand that they haven't necessarily got three chances, and also, to make them understand that it's meant to protect everyone's rights' (24 September 2013).

2.3.2 Housing Officers' understandings of the purposes of the rules and whether they are working

Question 2 of the survey (What is the intended purpose or objective of each of these rules?) aimed to generate understandings of how individuals may justify their approach to the implementation of the rules. Note that at the pilot interview stage, this was identified as a difficult question and not easily answered, neither by Housing Officers nor tenants. This proved to be the case throughout all of the interviews. One Housing Officer (Isa 1) differentiated the rule purpose according to the policy origin, either as a Residential Tenancy Agreement condition ('breaches') or an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy issue ('harmonious community intent'). Another provided a generic political reason: 'to bring all under one social housing, state wide' (Isa 13). In terms of the three consensus rule sets provided by the staff under Question 1, the following diverse reasons were provided as to their purpose.

Rental payment was the most closely enforced rule

Putting aside several answers that simply said 'to comply with RTA regulations', some stated that the rental rule was to raise revenue for governments (Isa 2, 5), noting that the monies did not all come back into 'the regional office's budget and that they did not cover all of the expenses, [and] that the system was subsidised'. One officer said the funds were for 'protecting the asset' (Isa 13).

There was a general consensus by Housing Officers that this rule was working well; for example, Isa 1 said 'yes; Mt Isa has the lowest arrears rate in the state at present'. The informal policy in the Mt Isa Office of building credit through rental advance payments was highlighted:

> The paying rent rule has pretty much always been there and is working. We encourage people to pay more rent. Pay a little bit more. Get in advance. Can withdraw as a refund to pay a bill. We have evicted a couple of people for rent arrears—some of worst [clients] are not Indigenous. We have KPIs; we must be under 4 or 5 per cent arrears. If they have to get yard rubbish out, they can hire a skip, if extra funds [have been accumulated]. (Isa 4)

Even in the outer region at Mornington Island, a good level of rental payment was noted: as a '6 or 7 per cent arrears rate (average in state is about 12%)' (Isa 13). However, there was a lapse of payment noted at Normanton where it was said that 'after Christmas, people are away, then they do not pay rent, and then they come back to school; they don't pay when on holiday' (Isa 2).

Looking after the house and keeping it undamaged, tidy, clean

Here again, there was a mixture of reasons given, encompassing health and hygiene outcomes, protecting the asset and conforming to a social norm. This last purpose is quite pertinent as it was echoed in a significant number of tenant responses. One officer said:

> It's a matter of public perception. You shouldn't be able to tell it's a government house. Need to be following council by laws. Having pride in your home. Contributing to the community. If the yards look good, the whole town looks good. It's about appreciating home and pride. (Isa 4)

Most agreed this rule was working albeit with exceptions: 'Yes for majority, but not very well for a minority; these minority cases stick out' (Isa 5). Three Housing Officers (Isa 1, 4, 5) commented on the recurring lack of house cleaning skills, and their efforts to educate tenants on this.

Respecting neighbour rule

Embedded in the responses of respecting one's neighbours is the issue of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people co-residing in the Mt Isa suburbs as well as other rural towns in the region.

> To maintain peace in the neighbourhood. In smaller communities, problems can impinge on the whole community. In larger communities, there can be flow-on of the 'image' of social housing tenants. Can lead to perception in the community that social housing tenants are in some way inferior. A large group living in one house are often viewed as unacceptable. DHPW is trying to change that perception for example that in some instances large groups can offer family support, such as re drugs and alcohol. Family support from the top generation to the children is important. (Isa 3)

Other rules mentioned by the Housing Officers related to the 'Failing to reside', 'three strikes' and the Household membership declaration rules:

Failing to reside

Some tenants had 'two tenancies, one in Mt Isa and one in a more remote community and only paying rent in the one house in which they are residing at the time. One Housing Officer noted that this rule worked if staff had a knowledge of such absenteeism of the tenant, but added '… if it goes undetected … some cases like this … we find out because the rent stops, [but in one case] Centrelink kept paying the rent for quite a while before it was detected' (Isa 2).

Three strikes rule

The focus of the 'three strikes' rule is on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). One Housing Officer provided an explanation of this rule:

> Anti-Social Behaviour—we have always been able to breach people for this. Only thing that's new is the 'three strikes' rule, which makes it all clearer. What it does is to bring it to public attention; provides education for tenants and the public … to show we do react to problems. It has a political function also. (Isa 4)

One officer attributed an increased compliance with the rules about looking after the house and yard, as being due to the introduction of the three strikes rule. She added that the Anti-Social Behaviour policy means that the Department is not now 'the tiger with no teeth' and that it has 'the ability to enforce its policy' (Isa 3). There had been few strikes registered in all centres in North-west Queensland due to the educational campaign by the Housing Office (Isa 1, 13) although this conditionality had been in operation for only a short period. Housing Officers (Isa 2, 4) commented on the educational outcomes as being knowledge imparted on the rights and responsibilities of the tenant and on the consequences of breaking the rules.

Only been in place seven months and it is a much more lengthy process [compared to before]. We've been educating tenants for a year now that it was coming. It is working in getting it out there, educating tenants on their rights and responsibilities (how to negotiate, appeal). (Isa 2)

Household membership declaration rule

There was clearly some difficulty for Housing Officers to get people to comply with this rule, as well as a degree of flexibility noted around its administration, given tenant poverty, high visitation rates and sharing ethic.

But we can't force our way in to check whose living there—we are not like Centrelink—we rely on their honesty to tell us. We sign them up from the day they tell us—we don't bother chasing people up for arrears on that. No back payments are charged even though we are empowered to do it. (Isa 4)

Adherence to the household membership declaration rule was explained to the tenant as aiding in tenancy successions.

But if an old person tenant passes away or goes to a nursing home, visitors may be entitled to take over the house; and if they are not on the household list, they are not entitled. They need to be registered to get such entitlements. (Isa 4)

2.3.3 Tenant knowledge of the Housing conditionalities

Tenants demonstrated their knowledge of the tenancy rules which provided a basis for an understanding of their perceptions regarding their individual housing experiences in the Mt Isa region (as explored in a later section). Question 1 asked the 24 tenants 'What are the rules that you have to follow for your house?' All 24 regular tenants were able to elicit between three and five individual rules that they had to follow in their house to comply with their tenancy agreement. They generally provided a more fractured set of detailed rules and their various caveats as opposed to the three main rule set or clusters elicited by housing staff, which were each more of an amalgamation of detailed rules into these three rule sets (rent, cleanliness and tidiness, anti-social behaviour). The reason for this was probably personal experience in being asked to comply with particular breaches by Housing Officers. The following rules were elicited from the tenants:

1. Pay the rent (19 responses).

2. Don't make noise (17).

3. Don't damage house (17).

4. Not too many in house (15).

5. Keep the yard tidy (13).

6. Keep the house tidy/clean (11).

7. Respect neighbours (8).

In order to give some idea of how the rules of tenancy operated in practice for the tenants, the following discussion relates to the rules provided, briefly presenting the tenants' ideas on the purpose of the rules (Question 2) and focussing on whether the rules were working (Question 3).

1. Most tenants stated that it was important to pay the rent (19 disagreed) which was needed for the cost of maintenance, and 19 said that the rule was working.

Most tenants stated it was working particularly because their rent was prepaid from their Centrelink income. Several tenants said 'it's mostly working' but then some of them cited an example where it did not work (Isa 15, 19, 23), describing situations where they felt they were treated unfairly on other tenancy issues, especially a lack of house repairs. A reason why rent payment was clearly working was the practice of paying rent in advance: 'Keep in advance in case one week can't afford, then do catch-up payment; but can get the advance back when vacate the house' (Isa 21).

2. Some 17 referred to the rule, 'don't make noise' and said it was working.

Some said this rule was working for them, for example those who did not drink alcohol (Isa 7) or those who had a strong householder. There were a significant proportion of tenants who said this rule was not working, either due to noisy children or drunk people. Many were ambivalent saying it worked for many or for most of the time, but not always (Isa 9). Some indicated they had an ethic of tolerance, refraining from making complaints when it did happen.

3. Some 17 referred to the rule 'don't damage the house'.

Most seemed to think this rule was working, having learnt from experience they will be made to pay if it is breached. Learning the benefit of reporting wilful damage by an unwanted or antisocial visitor was appreciated by some, although at times contravening Aboriginal social norms: 'If someone breaks in and breaks a window, I inform the police—they [DHPW] fix it for nothing then' (Isa 20).

4. Some 15 referred to the rule 'not too many in the house'.

The idea that the house was for one's self and not to be widely shared, was relevant for some tenants. For example, Isa 25 said 'given the house for self. See too much people coming and staying'; and Isa 30 stated 'You are on an agreement to pay the rent; if there are damages you pay—other people not responsible' (Isa 30). Responses suggested the tenants' needs for limiting household size and number of visitors but only one tenant gave any quantitative rules on this. Furthermore, whilst most people had a view on how long visitors could stay, there was no consistency surrounding times with prescription ranging from one week to three months.

Whether or not this rule of 'not too many in the house' was working, there seemed a balance of views for and against. Several referred to the short supply of large houses (four and five bedrooms) in Mt Isa for the large families in need and the extent of household crowding: 'overcrowded houses everywhere, two to three families per house' (Isa 21).

5. 'Keep the yard tidy' (13 no) and 19 agreed they were working, and

6. 'Keep the house tidy and clean' (11 no) and 11 indicated it was working.

Most said the rule of keeping the yard tidy was working (e.g. Isa 7, 9, 19, 20), but one argued it did not work for those with regular visitors. As for keeping the house tidy and clean, there was more or less a balance of views on whether this rule was or was not working. Those who lived in Pioneer experienced the most difficulty, due to high visitation rates and intoxicated behaviours. Another reason given for difficulty was having dogs in the yard: 'We have dogs here—they rip up teddy bears and knock the bin over at night, and the neighbours' dogs jump our fence' (Isa 22).

7. Respect neighbours (8 no).

Most tenants interviewed (8) seemed to think this rule (respect neighbours) worked within limits. Respect for shift workers and the elderly was noted. And the necessary acceptance and tolerance of children making noise was also noted: 'Yes, I scream

and yell during day, but it's always quiet here at night; so kids make a noise in the day; well they're kids!' (Isa 23).

Eight tenants also mentioned the 'three strikes' rule in conjunction with their assertion that rules were getting tighter. But two others qualified that the three strikes rules did not always work (Isa 10,23).

> Three strikes puts a lot of stress on families and a big strain on family relations; a traditional family because of their traditional upbringing—they're altogether, kinship, very close. (Isa 26)

One couple thought the rule about respecting neighbours was working although they were reluctant to complain about noise because they did not want to be responsible for anyone's eviction:

> We don't make noise and nobody complains; we are a tight community. But someone else [in the neighbourhood] calls the police—not sure who. But we don't want to see them made homeless [evicted]. (Isa 14)

This section has set out the basic understanding of housing conditionality from Housing Officers and Indigenous social housing tenants in Mt Isa. Both Housing Officers and tenants have in mind a set of rules that have significant commonalities but also some differences. The following sections provide an analysis of their respective perceptions of the rules, their appropriateness and their positive and negative impacts.

3   TENANT PERSPECTIVES

This chapter draws on the responses of participants who were Indigenous social housing tenants, or were on the waiting list to become social housing tenants in houses managed by DHPW in Mt Isa. There is also a secondary focus on transitional housing managed by Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre and Ngurri Ngurri Women's Refuge which together highlight particular areas of need for housing in the city.

A preliminary analysis of tenants' responses suggested that most tenants knew the basic rules of tenancies and thought that the rules were working well enough. It was also evident that only a minority of respondents understood and/or could articulate the intended purposes of the rules that they followed. Most tenants and transitional accommodation clients seemed to realise that they needed to abide by the rules or risk their eviction, and chose not to openly question government or other authorities, although they seemed quite prepared to vent issues with the interviewers.

This summary analysis does not mean that participants were completely satisfied with the housing situation. On the contrary, tenants were aware that there was insufficient housing in Mt Isa and that many Indigenous people struggled to maintain tenancies for a range of reasons. Their perspectives can be explained further with reference to social and cultural capital, their perceptions of agency within their tenancy agreements and the limited potential for economic change.

Tenants' perceptions of hardships of conditionality

Question 4 asked tenants 'Are these rules getting tighter or slacking off (weaker)?' Some 18 out of 24 tenants said the rules were getting 'tighter', one said 'about the same', two said 'weaker' and three said 'don't know'. In reporting the rules to be getting tighter, many referred to specific rules in relation to their own personal experiences. Answers to Question 4 cited 'Visitor problems' as a recurring theme in relation to increasing conditionality. Question 5 asked 'What rules are the most difficult for you to meet?' Again the largest cluster of responses focused on the difficulties of dealing with visitors and the negative impacts of visitors, both in terms of excessive unapproved numbers and engaging in anti-social behaviour. In these circumstances, it was shown that households violated the rules about 'not too many in the house', 'don't make noise', 'respect neighbours', 'keep yard and house tidy' and 'don't damage house'. These aspects will be discussed further under 'social constraints' (Section 3.2).

Some specific examples were given of the tightening of other rules besides those that fell under the 'three strikes' rule. Three tenants said that the hardest rule to adhere to was paying the rent (Isa 10, 19, 23). Organising payments from long-term visitors while they were on the waiting list was another problem cited (Isa 19). Most tenants did not feel supported with house maintenance, which was often a long and difficult process, particularly if they had been charged for damage (not normal wear and tear) that had then forced their rental account into arrears.

Water restriction is not a rule pertaining specifically to the Tenancy Agreement, but a set of associated issues do pertain to the maintenance of the house and yard that occur in a drought-prone mining region. One tenant said that the hardest tenancy problem in Mt Isa was:

> Water restrictions and costs. There's not enough water in this city and they're putting up the rates. We shouldn't have to pay any more. Big water fines if hose out of hours. I hose at 6pm for half an hour. The water supply has got

algae, bacteria, and lead in it. The ground and air has got lead in it, so Aboriginal kids in Pioneer are poisoned. (Isa 20)

Figure 5: Scenes around Mt Isa

Source: Daphne Nash

Others described suffering physical and economic hardships. The majority of household heads are women and, of those interviewed, most complained of the difficulty they have in maintaining the yard. Most rely on male relatives to do the heavy work and for a vehicle to transport rubbish. Large families with multiple children also find it difficult to keep the house and yard tidy. Three tenants (Isa 16, 24, 26) who were single parents or single elderly persons thus said keeping the yard clean was a hard rule for them (including lawn mowing). For example:

Keeping the yard clean is hard. I'm alone, no car. It costs a lot to maintain the yard. It's $100 for a man to do mowing, cleaning up & taking away rubbish (also old bed, couches); otherwise I have to wait for family to clean things up. (Isa 16)

One young mother who was not an experienced head tenant pointed out that a most demanding requirement was the physical demand of house cleaning: 'For me it's hard

to keep the house clean and tidy because when you clean up it makes your body sore and you have to do it every day' (Isa 29). However, when discussing hardships, most tenants commented on particular cultural practices that conflicted with conditionality.

Culturally specific practices that conflicted with the rules

Question 6 asked tenants 'Do your ways of living run up against these housing rules?' and Question 7 further explored this issue by asking 'Which of these practices are allowed in Aboriginal culture; or what do Aboriginal people think is OK, but government people do not?' Three distinct sets of issues were raised apart from hosting visitors and extended family (to be discussed later), viz. hearths, dogs and time/sleeping behaviour constructs.

Conflicts over contemporary practice of using external hearths and cooking in yards

Six tenants (Isa 16, 18, 20, 22, 23) raised the customary behaviours of hearth cooking and social usage as essential customary practices, but which raised complaints. For example: 'Outside fire, especially in winter; so had complaints from neighbours about the smoke, and Housing say you're not supposed to have a fire drum' (Isa 16). Several of them referred to this issue in conjunction with accommodating visitors, that is implying that kitchen facilities were not able to readily accommodate larger-scale cooking practices when hosting extended family members.

> [We need a] fireplace where we can sit—have one out back so no one sees it. Gas in houses. Black people don't know how to use that; and gas is expensive—if have a small gas bottle it costs about $20 (for one week). (Isa 19)

> The barbecue rule—if you want a mid-week barbecue, you can't do it; we had barramundi and freshwater turtle to cook. (Isa 22)

When external hearths are being used, complaints are likely to be made by non-Aboriginal neighbours about the smell of smoke, smoke impacting on line washing and the noise of externally socialising groups (Isa 22).

> Can't have fires going, only on weekend … Not too many people can be sitting around at home on weekend because people around, and get noise complaint … Housing don't like people—can't have many in yard. They say: 'Don't want to hear excuses, no "ifs" and "buts"', even if it's not your fault. (Isa 22)

One tenant had insightful reflections on the relaxed externally-oriented Aboriginal lifestyle in a rural town contrasted with the more intense life in Mt Isa:

> When in Dajarra and Dangie [Urandangi], we always lived the old traditional way. Indigenous people like to camp outside. Only in last decade A/C [air conditioner] come in. For decades no A/C. Have to be flexible about these things. We always had a fire bucket—a safe fire bucket. If [DHPW] can be a little bit lenient. Build a little fire area—where sit around fire. Talk and reminisce. Made of concrete or steel. Winters are very cold here. Some in Pioneer pay $50 to $100 for a load of gidgea or snappy gum. Like to cook kangaroo tail and bush tucker in ground oven. We still got that old way. (Isa 26)

The customary practice of keeping dogs

Three tenants (Isa 11, 15, 26) referred to the customary Aboriginal attachment to dogs, as resulting in a tenancy problem with DHPW.

> Families in Pioneer got animals—but it's illegal to have animals. What Indigenous family don't have dogs? We are all animal lovers; we inherit that from our grandparents. They are too hard on Aboriginal people. (Isa 26)

> If got dogs in house you're breaking the law; no pets in housing. When inspection you get evicted but everyone knows dogs are there. (Isa 26)

Different cultural attitude to time and sleeping behaviour

One respondent pointed to different constructs of time and sleeping behaviours characteristic of Aboriginal people.

> White people are on a 'time limit' [i.e. a strict routine]. Their kids are on a time for everything—when to go to bed and so on [But not Aboriginal people] Aboriginal people can go bush, come home [late], kids can go to bed at 9 or 10; and kids sleep with us. My 'grannies' still sleep with me, for protection … how else can I keep them safe … given the number of rapes around here. (Isa 7)

The lead author and others had carried out a research study of Aboriginal household crowding in Mt Isa during 2011–12 (Memmott et al. 2012). It was revealed that the strong household heads of large households (up to 30 people) allocated people with sleeping groups in different spaces in and around their houses according to particular rules pertaining to age, generation and gender that generate preferred and non-preferred choices. These rules were based on customary principles of sleeping behaviour.

Acceptance of conditionality by a minority

Whilst most had problems with conditionality, some four of the 24 tenants (Isa 11, 17, 27, 14) said there were no rules that were too difficult and that they could adhere to them all, even acknowledging the 'three strikes' rule. For example, Isa 17 said: 'I have had inspections (one every two months), and housing is happy—'good feedback' that yard improved—so I'm happy that they're happy'. A few tenants also said that the tightening of the rules was a 'good' or a 'very good' thing or 'they [Housing] should be making them even tighter. For example:

> Getting a little bit tighter [but] they should be stricter. Takes a long time to get housing because houses are getting destroyed and no money to fix-up and so [Department] should inspect houses more frequently. (Isa 21)

> If someone comes and makes nuisance the government will kick you out; that's fine. (Isa 29)

Of only two interviewees who said the rules were 'slacking off', one said '[Housing] hardly come around; only come if something happens or you call them' (Isa 25).

3.1 Social cultural capital and constraints

3.1.1 Aboriginal social capital and circular mobility

Mt Isa tenants who are having the most difficulty with achieving or sustaining tenancies in government housing are disadvantaged not only due to lack of education and employment but also due to constraints within their system of social capital that need to be considered in a dynamic regional perspective.

Mt Isa operates as a regional service, recreation and shopping centre for a vast region extending throughout western and north-western Queensland and eastern NT. It has also been a destination of regional migration over four generations from the various rural towns and former mission settlements scattered throughout. These migrations

were triggered from the late 1960s and early 1970s by the relaxation of the Aboriginal Acts and the subsequent freedom to travel and to consume alcohol, the introduction of equal wages on cattle stations, which de-stabilised pastoral settlements and work relationships, the introduction of welfare payments which combined and facilitated a capacity to travel. Diverse Aboriginal families have thus become established in rental housing in Mt Isa with particular networks back to home communities in all corners of the region. Following the first generation of immigrant presence, inter-marriage between second generation from different home communities (and hence from different socio-geographic or tribal areas) has resulted in dual sets of family connections to two or more settlements. This phenomenon of community and tribal exogamy has a profound effect on contemporary visitation to rental households in a region characterised by high circular mobility between outer communities and the regional centre. Most Indigenous tenants have strong family and community connections in the region and beyond, so visiting family is a high priority. One household may attract visitors from several different communities. It is this high visitation rate that is the most recurring theme in the responses to the survey. As for other regions, patterns of Aboriginal migration and circular mobility in Mt Isa from regional and remote communities have had significant impact on the level of crowding which has been linked to increasing incidents of family violence and other social issues (Memmott et al 2012).

Many tenants have spent time on missions and bush communities where the lifestyle is different from urban dwelling and so they are used to living differently even if they have lived in houses. This means that they can struggle to adjust to social housing in Mt Isa; for example, the use of outdoor fires for warmth, cooking and socialising is widely practised but at times discouraged in Mt Isa by DHPW. Also with the dry climatic conditions and local water restrictions in the town, yards tend to be dry and dusty and present environmental health risks (including lead in the soil), particularly to children.

Difficulties can arise for tenancy when people 'fail to reside' and move away to visit kin in outer parts of the region, perhaps temporarily without informing DHPW. Similarly, some people have successfully applied for social housing in two locations, such as Alpururrulam (Lake Nash) and Mt Isa. Investigating these kinds of problems increases the administrative load of the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre of DHPW.

3.1.2 Social capital within Aboriginal families in housing matters

Question 9 asked 'Are family members helping with meeting the housing rules? Clear positive responses to this question were provided by 15 tenants (Isa 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29), often referring to householders and visitors 'chucking in' money to pay for rent, food and house damage bills. One tenant commented on enculturating children into appropriate supportive behaviours: 'Yes, by helping keep the yard clean; by paying rent if they stay longer …; and by not drinking at my place. It is more stable then; so kids grow up and follow how they see you living' (Isa 16). Strictness around rules was also emphasised by some householders (Isa 17, 29) as a necessary skill. Some mentioned the supportive role of visitors when firmly asked to assist. Some visitors from the NT were also said to be supportive despite their reputation for heavy drinking.

> Yes, they stay for a short time and they help with the rent and food when they stay … I'm very strict on that; I chuck in when I go to other people's houses and I expect the same. (Isa 17)

> Yes, if I tell them they listen to me—if it's noise, whatever—or I'll have to kick them out. (Isa 27)

> If they try [to make it hard for me to follow the rules] I'm not going to let them come and make it bad for me; I'm going to stand up for my rights. (Isa 30)

A few negative responses were received on this question. For example, Isa 7 said 'not really, they want to live their life as they want to live it', and Isa 19 stated 'Sometimes family members make it hard—they put pressure on you, so someone might bring out a can [of beer] and I tells them to drink out in the gutter—not at our house' (Isa 19).

The strong Aboriginal value of respect was mentioned.

> Yes, they respect place when come here, and keep yard clean, don't make noise, chuck money in, and buy cleaning stuff. (Isa 22)

> Everyone listens, [and I'm] strong in my heart, mind and soul, [but] if they get unruly, then coppers come. (Isa 25)

Four interviewees gave a mixed response conceding both support from some and difficulty from other family members (Isa 18, 19, 23, 30). Various tenants mentioned specific kin helping such as father, nieces, children; whilst certain other kin were the ones who make problems such as adult son, older brother.

> Yes, my grand-daughter passing through. [Problem of] my sister drunk, loud, crude, strips off naked in street, I told her to go, got police. (Isa 23)

3.1.3 Tenants' perceptions of the most difficult rules as being in relation to their visiting kin

As noted earlier, a cluster of responses on difficult rules focused on the problems of dealing with visitors and the negative impacts of visitors. The tenants violated the rules both in terms of excessive unapproved numbers and engaging in anti-social behaviour which they labelled as 'not too many in the house', 'don't make noise', 'respect neighbours' and 'don't damage house'. In response to the question about tenants' ways of living coming in conflict with the housing rules, again many specifically referred to family visitors (Isa 8, 10, 14, 16, 19, 22). Visitors who created problems was also a theme in whether conditionality was increasing (Q.4).

The driving force of kinship as a positive social capital

In response to the question about which household practices were allowed in Aboriginal culture but conflicted with conditionality, 13 tenants referred to the Aboriginal custom of taking in visitors as a necessary and unavoidable phenomenon, inherent to their culture (including Isa 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22). Visitors were profiled as large extended families arising from tribal exogamy (inter-marriage of language groups), sometimes diurnal visitors who may stay overnight, as well as people coming to Mt Isa from outer communities for funerals (and social grieving called 'sorry business') as well as other reasons.

Some visitors come from other communities whilst others come from other households in Mt Isa:

> Get a lot of family come for shopping, funeral, to have baby at hospital (all from Doomadgee); and my grandfather on dialysis in Townsville, comes up to visit for a couple days. (Isa 22)

> Rule about family visitors [are hardest]. I don't want them staying long but I do need them around. Issues with my four older children. I tried to get them a separate flat but their Centrelink payments [Newstart, Youth Allowance] are not enough to cover the rent. (Isa 15)

Customary mourning behaviours are still maintained albeit transforming in certain ways:

> Yes, at funeral times, everyone stays—can have about three families living with you. Recently two brothers died in a month … I tell Housing that family will be staying for a couple of weeks. (Isa 16)

> If family pass away, sit down and yarn. They come from certain areas, come to see you. Most [in Mt Isa] don't do 'square-up' [in traditional way] anymore, but they still do in Doomadgee. People here just sit down in sorrow—show respect, sharing sorrow. (Isa 25)

Many emphasised the kinship values underlying the accommodating of visitors. Thus Isa 24 said 'Reckon should have family or old friend to visit, especially when reunions, if haven't seen someone for years', and Isa 18 said, 'Aboriginal people love to have their family around.'

> You can't tell family to get lost and go down the river. These white people don't know how we work. We spiritual people look after one another. If one gets drunk, you look after their kid. We are caring and sharing people. (Isa 25)

Adverse impacts of visitors

Responses to Question 5 found that 'visitors' generated the hardest challenge to the rules, and critical visitor behaviour was further unpacked around issues of noise, alcohol abuse, arguments, damage to house (punch walls, graffiti), paying rent, informing Housing Office, and upsetting white neighbours (Isa 10, 16, 15, 27, 28). Most specifically referred to extended family visitors (Isa 10, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26; also Isa 8, 14). Examples of expressions of problems:

> Hardest ones for people to keep to are stopping drunken fights and noise upsetting neighbours. (Isa 28)

Parties getting out of control were said to be a regular occurrence, and that there were some who 'would like to have a party nearly every day' (Isa 27).

> Hard to stop parties. It starts as a kid, then turns to adult partying. Georgina River people have married into other groups … so everyone has big family [who come to parties] … Then someone calls the police. Half of the town is our people …. (Isa 8)

The role of alcohol was often at the centre of these adverse impacts.

> Yes. Aboriginal people are drinking and misbehaving and run up against the rules. Drink is the way of some people—but it's not really an Aboriginal way. (Isa 28)

The impact of visitors from Central-eastern NT Communities was viewed by many as particularly problematic, for example:

> Don't want a lot of people in houses. Cases here of 30 people in a house—all remote area people—people on income management plan—people come here with $240 a week and it creates homelessness; their cards can't be cashed here. Not enough transit accommodation. (Isa 20)

The impact of visitors can also impact on the ability to comply with 'keep-the-yard-tidy' rule:

> No it doesn't work. Around rodeo and funerals there's a lot more garbage because of the increase in visitors—makes the bins full, cars in the yard and baggage from people. Aboriginal families are big and have 'get together'. One

bin per household doesn't work. And single parents can have difficulty meeting the date to get rubbish removed. (Isa 15)

Two tenants commented on visitor rules getting tighter over rodeo; 'only eight people allowed to stay for rodeo was a rule' (Isa 23), and 'If visitors come for Rodeo or Show, gotta let Housing know' (Isa 24). External socialising by visitors was also a sensitive topic: 'Can't sit on veranda with visitors—that's a breach' (Isa 24). The economic difficulty of supporting lots of visitors was raised by several interviewees (Isa 8, 11) especially if the household was reliant on a pension and/or a carer's allowance.

Despite the impact of noise on neighbours, three raised the idea of noisy socialising as a typically Aboriginal behaviour (although one with reservations) (Isa 9, 29, 30). For example: 'Some Aboriginal people love noise, love to party, but it's not a bad thing; it makes them who they are and it makes them happy' (Isa 29). And several outlined the difficulty of rejecting kinspersons.

> Doesn't work too well. Can't say 'no' to family. If say 'no' they want to fight with you for knocking them back. That's why I lost my first house. Pretty hard with own family fighting with you. Want to stay up all night partying; loud noise. Housing knew it wasn't me, but my visitors. I was up to date with rent. I'm paying for maintenance for houses—still taking out $50 a fortnight. (Isa 24)

> Family rule is very hard. If Housing want someone to go then they'll have an argument with me first before they leave. And we don't want that to happen—it takes a while to go back (two or three months) to get back together again—to say sorry. (Isa 18)

Tenant perceptions of the hardships and constraints of the suburb of Pioneer

The norms and social capital expressing the values of Aboriginal unity, reciprocity and respect for kin were most prevalent in Pioneer, the suburb with the highest density of Aboriginal social housing tenants, many of whom were unemployed. Thus 'The Bronx' was a site of high Aboriginal social capital, but also a site where social capital was abused and violated when intoxicated people took advantage of the norms of tenant hospitality. Family violence, crowding and alcohol-fuelled behaviour were thus prevalent and recurring in Pioneer. These circumstances, together with Aboriginal people's preference for outdoor living, often result in highly visible anti-social behaviour and frequent neighbourhood complaints. Much inter-household visitation occurred, especially amongst younger people when they were intoxicated. Thus:

> When Jimmy here, we need to go hunting—we had a cooking hob beside the shed—we'd cook in it. In the Bronx [Pioneer], if they see fire, and then a hundred people come into the yard! (Isa 23)

For those living in or having experience in Pioneer there was clearly a view that the rule of keeping the yard tidy was not working. Isa 23 said 'It's a common thing in the Bronx for the yard to be always untidy', and Isa 21 stated that the Department 'should be more strict, [because] it's so filthy in this area [Pioneer].' Again Pioneer was signalled as a suburb where the noise compliance rule did not work: 'In some areas people don't listen; say in Pioneer, the rule doesn't work there' (Isa 16). The problem of drunks on the street and drunken brawls in the street as has occurred in recent years in Pioneer, was also reported.

> At least 200 people were drunk on the weekend in Kaeser Road Park [Pioneer]. I borrowed a friend's dog at the start of rodeo [to keep people out of yard]. They walk into your yard; come from Lake Nash—from dry communities. (Isa 21)

When people are drunk and fighting on the street, the tenant is sometimes blamed and penalised by DHPW if the guilty ones are in some way connected to their household, that is the tenant is held responsible for the behaviour of their visitors on the street. This conditionality was resisted by several tenants.

> People in street and hanging in front of house, making noise; then cops come and say 'it's you making noise'. People were sitting on road drinking. On rodeo weekend had to kick people out of the yard (NT mob); they walked in and just sat on the veranda. (Isa 22)

> … the part when out of the yard is unfair [people misbehaving on footpath or on street]. We shouldn't get into trouble, [but] if playing loud music and partying I agree [we should]. (Isa 21)

3.2 Tenant agency

In this section we consider to what extent tenants feel they have control, and what are the ways whereby tenants create and/or exert informal agency within the housing system in Mt Isa (e.g. through kinship, social capital, leadership, surveillance, communicating with Housing, suggesting ideas, albeit only having limited outlets for such). Aspects of the agency of tenants were revealed in the response to Question 16, which asked 'What are you, the housing tenant, trying to get to happen or achieve?', as well as in responses to other questions.

3.2.1 Goals and agency concerning lifestyle of children

Six interviewees (Isa 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26) emphasised lifeworld goals around the well-being of their children. Other tenants identified their need to effectively secure and negotiate good housing services as well as other welfare and health services; also to control visitors and choose appropriate neighbourhoods in which to rent.

> Because I'm a renal patient, partner is on disability and my daughters need a roof over their heads while they are going to school—they need a place to relax, have their own room and have own things. Other family members steal, claim your things when you live with them. (Isa 19)

> Getting suitable housing in the urban environment, and making use of state government facilities like clinics, hospital, school for children which is unavailable in remote communities. (Isa 20)

> … bring children and grandchildren up in a good atmosphere—in a respectable environment, with no alcohol and drugs; [nor] bad influences. (Isa 26)

One aspect of securing effective housing services that was raised by several tenants was the guarantee of timely R&M services, which they indicated were more reliable from DHPW than various other agencies not withstanding a number of specific complaints. However, by way of contrast, our inquiries of people who had lived in ICHO or private rental houses indicated that R&M services had been rare or non-existent.

> To make sure my kids have a stable house. You never know what's going to happen. Lots of trouble with private rental. Air-conditioning never fixed properly and leads to my son's increasing number of seizures. [so prefers DHPW Housing]. (Isa 17)

> I'm a sick man, [and] I came to this house. Just want a government house—everything ok, going pretty good; they do it up. If you ask, they come and do it for you … Qbuild come in a couple of weeks. (Isa 10)

However, at the same time there were a number of interviewees who complained about the unreasonably long waiting times for DHPW R&M services that occurred on occasions, for example as one single mother explained:

> I want to keep the house but I hate living in a big house and they're not doing anything or fixing it up. Sometimes it makes me miserable just waiting. One door still broken—been like that for one year. Recently they did the kitchen—had no cupboards but lovely now. Everything else in the house is old. (Isa 16)

3.2.2 Agency in reforming own lifestyle

For some, the first need of their self-agency was to reform their own lifestyles to achieve their well-being goals.

> Keeping living in house, keeping clean and not to have constant harassment and mail. Show them that this not an alcoholic house; just have a drink now and again. (Isa 22)

> Trying to change; going to get a house in 'Curry [Cloncurry]. We don't drink in 'Curry; only in Isa—too many drinking friends, too much temptation. [We're] learning to say 'no'; no drink for a week. (Isa 24)

3.2.3 Achieving independence, stability and at peace

For a substantial number of interviewees (Isa 12, 27, 28, 29, 30), their ability for achieving a sense of independence, stability and/or peace in their rental households was paramount.

> Quiet place; I like this place. Make a garden there [and] Housing happy about that—had tomatoes, chilli, celery. I won two certificates—presented at the Buffalo Club. I call my garden 'The Drover's Campstop' … I used gutter leaves that fell from council trees as mulch; that's being self-sufficient. Do garden again winter time. No problems with Housing, Centrelink. (Isa 12)

> I've got two daughters and I want my own place and privacy. I'll stick to rules. I need my own place for as long as I can. I grew up with family but it's time I made a life for myself and lived on my own. (Isa 30)

3.2.4 Agency in managing visitors

In response to questions about whether there was conflict between conditionality and Aboriginal lifestyle, several made responses to the effect that they could adapt or curtail Aboriginal behaviours to fit within the rules, suggesting they were strong householders who could control their visitors including when they got out of hand.

> Not really—I'm not going to worry because it won't happen much. People usually come for short visits (10minutes); but if they try to stay for long time I'll stand up and say if you don't go I'll call the police. (Isa 30)

> No I keep any people—go by your rules. I keep house clean. Will hunt them away if they get on my nerves. My rules are: (1) Have a curfew; when drunks must get out of yard especially when kids are asleep; (2) no walking in the yard without permission—can't walk in and sit down and drink grog. Gotta have respect; a lot of them do. (3) No disturbance; drink in moderation and quiet, don't 'big note' and throw weight around … Or out through the gate. (Isa 25)

A number made responses specifically about being prepared to have specific visitors staying, especially extended family whom they could control.

[No] Just have a few people to visit [elicits four people]. We just sit down quiet, and have a few drinks as long as we keep our voices down. (Isa 12)

Family like to stay. We can work with the rules. They stay for Rodeo, and then go back. Have visitors—two granddaughters from Cloncurry; two grandsons—really good to have them here in school holidays. (Isa 18)

Housing do allow visitors … for rodeo or funeral—might have extended family. Must let Housing know, but they try to be flexible. (Isa 26)

Family coming around; but when I get my own place I'll stand up to them. When you've got lots of kids running around from visiting family it's hard to keep them quiet. (Isa 30)

3.2.5 Agency in dealing with social problems that impinge on family wellbeing in rental housing

A number of interviewees indicated their agency over controlling their visitors acknowledging that the DHPW rules can at times help with this.

This house for me and my six children. I let my sister stay for a while but I don't want her living here permanently. You feel uncomfortable if too many other people. I like to be a bit quiet. I like this rule. I don't want them to be a burden to me. If my sister from Townsville stays too long, I have to pay rent; so she only stays two or three months. For me it's a good rule. It might be different for others … so NT people like to bring all their family. When I travel, I don't stay with others, I stay at a hostel. (Isa 23)

Isa 8 commented on handling visitors: 'I have my own rules—they've gotta help; if they've got money then they've got to buy food; they can get help from Catholic Church and Neighbourhood Centre' (Isa 8). And Isa 26 commented:

For loud music. Some people go overboard. [Housing and police] could be a bit flexible with time limit [for stopping noise]. Chronic alcoholic who party day and night lack respect, but there is only a minority of them. Should be more flexible with time factor. My sister says 'keep "noise down or I'll cut the cord with a knife"' (to my niece). (Isa 26)

One tenant described conscripting help from relatives in other Mt Isa householders when family problems occurred:

I'd talk to them. Aboriginal people, we can't live without family. If someone on other side of town has a housing problem, someone will phone … We have to sort that out. If my partner goes drinking … I phone my auntie or niece to come and sort it out. A lot more people come and go in a house than for non-Aboriginal people! (Isa 18)

Four respondents qualified their response to Q7 on visitors, by acknowledging that a problem may happen but indicating they could or would impose limits to prevent or limit such. For example:

Visitors anytime—every second day, just a bit; [but] big mobs for funerals. We just go along with it, [but] have to hunt them after three days (or a day maybe!) (Isa 27)

Can get a sign [No Alcohol] so people can see [but] if they don't take notice, we'll call the cops. (Isa 18)

Some interviewees outlined how as householders they stood up to those engaging in anti-social behaviour in their yards and homes. For example:

I had a 'No alcohol' sign because I'm an ex drinker but I took it down about three months ago. I'd rather stand up for myself. When I saw the sign wasn't working, I decided to do it my way. Standing and confronting them at the gate. 'No alcohol allowed. This is a grog free household.' I need to put a stop to it and don't let one drinker in. If one is in then you let everyone in. (Isa 15)

One tenant outlined a strategy for visitor control which breached compliance associated with the household size rule.

It's pretty hard thing to claim them on your house list—then you can have an argument; they say 'I pay rent here too'. They might argue the point. Better to not have them on the list; then you can keep control and let them give money and buy food. Then tell them to leave if they play up. (Isa 22)

One interviewee spoke of the importance of mentoring, counselling and providing positive home environments for children and youth.

Good, but because of family relations in this town such as teenagers, kids in the street. When I lost my grandson about two years ago (he hanged himself). I sit down and talk to his mum—forgave her [for not looking after some, and favouring others]—I talked to 17 of them. They took it to heart, and listened. They stopped fighting on the streets. Country kids are happy out of town but in town … kids are in and out of court—need a children's home, and someone to give an example to them; need to get them off the streets … If I had five children, I wouldn't just love one, I'd have to love them all; there's a problem now when mothers don't treat them all the same; it builds up in children … they hurt. And when drinking: don't drink around children … so they don't think that's it in life … grog and fighting. (Isa 8)

In response to Question 10 on whether community leaders were helping with meeting housing rules, two interviewees declared themselves to be taking this role (Isa 8, 25); for example Isa 8 understood herself to be a leader and stated: 'my house is a counselling centre, a women's shelter and a kindergarten' She went on to explain how conflict resolution mechanisms were changing 'As young people in Dajarra before, we learnt to 'knuckle-up' … [you might] bleed, but have to stand your ground'; then went on to comment how things were now different in Mt Isa with one set of conditionalities … 'here it doesn't matter what town or community—we're all one … but now young people don't have time to sit down and talk to their Elders'. (Isa 8)

3.2.6 Coping with and moving away from the problems in Pioneer (the 'Bronx')

One tenant contrasted life in 'the Bronx' with her new situation on Eastside and the transformation that the move had made to her own lifestyle and problems.

Eleven years ago I lived in Bronx. Moved away 2004. Bad, I wouldn't recommend it for a woman with small kids to live there. Kids get drunk there. [My brother] Jack used to live there. He used to have people drinking. I only visited him for five minutes or so. Now he's got a two bedroom flat near the Red Rooster. When I was in the Bronx, I was bad at gambling; I never paid rent. I've given up gambling now. Won't allow my 16-year-old girl to go there [the Bronx]. No problem this side of town [Eastside]. [Only] white boys are the drunks here …. (Isa 23)

Some tenants preferred to go back down the priority (or waiting) list and wait longer for a transfer house rather than be moved into Pioneer by DHPW.

I have had transfer [request] in place for four years, for a larger house [seven children altogether]. Currently in three bedroom, but need four or more bedroom. I only have moderate need according to Housing. So I'm advised that application will probably be in for a long time. Housing say: 'You have to take the first house available'. But it always comes up first in Pioneer and that's the main area for drinking. (Isa 15)

3.3 Economic development potential

3.3.1 Economic obstacles and limitations for many Aboriginal people in Mt Isa

Most interview participants were not in salaried work nor were they focused on getting a job. Most were recipients of welfare payments through pension or unemployment benefits or on Newstart. Their rents were paid by automated deductions via Centrelink. Without jobs and other forms of social capital, they have had little opportunity to move out of their current rental housing in the city Mt Isa. There is little to suggest that unemployment for Indigenous people in Mt Isa is likely to change in the mainstream services, industry or government sectors. Few Aboriginal people are employed in the underground mining. There is however a new work-for-the-dole program (RJCP) that may create some potential for the Aboriginal economy in the region. This is being administered by an Aboriginal organisation, Rainbow Gateway P/L.

One interviewee equated economic poverty with Aboriginal life, stating '[I have] low-income—it's expensive to buy furniture and fittings for a house. That's a problem. I collect mine from dump or second hand shops; I need extra chairs for visitors' (Isa 20). A life of alcohol addiction can also exacerbate economic disadvantage as one interview admitted:

> Not giving us a fair go, but it's our fault too, because of drinking. I drink here, but only once a week; settled down now … I slow down drinking here a lot; but if stay with sister, all my money goes on grog. Since here, learning how to spend money, do shopping, [so] it's pretty good. (Isa 24)

A few tenants commented on how they had rejected or would reject employment opportunities so as not to lose their house under the rule that an income of over $80 000 makes a tenant ineligible for social housing. One Housing Officer explained:

> Re the $80 000 income cap … have to move out of the house once the income reaches the limit. Example: a hard working father at the council earning $52 000. His wife (non-Indigenous) is on Centrelink getting $30 000 with six kids, but they are not entitled to home loans. The system is letting them down. No pathway is offered. They are discriminated against in private rental if they have say six kids. We have been trying to help them get an IBA loan to purchase a property. (Isa 2)

Nor did tenants want to move to private rental because they would have to pay much higher rents in the two-speed Mt Isa economy. At the start of the IMYRP Project in early 2012, private rental in Mt Isa was $500 to $600 for three bedrooms, the prices being exacerbated by the shortage of rental housing in Mt Isa (A.W. 6 March 2012). More generally, Indigenous tenants realise that they would not be successful in competing for private rental houses with non-Indigenous applicants on high salaries.

Obtaining employment also impacted on tenants in the form of increased rent:

> There were some issues with rent increases when I got a casual job—we need to be told early. Housing didn't tell me that the rent was going to go up when I got a job. So rent arrears built up. I got a bill … Happens to a lot of clients.

Housing don't care. They are in control, and we have nowhere else to live. (Isa 15)

One interviewee on a pension complained about a perceived rule of not being able to run a small home business from public rental housing without incurring an increase in rent:

> [Housing] are biased, prejudiced. Housing should change rules to suit Aboriginal way of living to align with discrimination laws. You can't run a business from your house like Aboriginal artwork, sell t-shirts, can't do that for a cultural hobby and subsistence money; can't have a second job, or casual job, unless you inform Housing—they will then deduct extra money [for rent]. (Isa 20)

In general, there were few findings on housing economy and other related economic issues that arose in the tenant interviews. One Kalkadoon Elder complained about the lack of Aboriginal people employed in the Government Housing Office. A few responses were obtained about the demise of housing co-operatives in the region (see Chapter 1 on policy landscape), but these interviewees did not indicate any current concern or advocate any action.

3.3.2 Minimal reporting of home ownership aspirations

Home ownership was not a strong or even moderate theme in responses, with only a few interviewees mentioning it as an aspiration (Isa 15, 28). Some tenants recognised home ownership as a possible desirable option for certain householders, but outside of their current economic reach (Isa 4, 27). Home ownership is not a viable alternative in most cases as people are accustomed to paying low rents which does not prepare them for the level of loan repayments. The premise that social housing should lead into home ownership does not fit well with the most vulnerable tenants, including single mothers, disabled persons and prison releases, who need separate strategies.

3.4 Towards Government and Indigenous and Community Organisations

3.4.1 The view that DHPW should accommodate Aboriginal behaviours

Question 8 asked tenants 'Should the rules respect Aboriginal ways of living, or should Aboriginal ways of living change to meet the rules?' Tenant responses were divided between both of these views as well as some for the compromise position. Six tenant interviewees said assertively that the tenancy rules should respect Aboriginal ways of living, versus four who said tenants should comply with rules. Two of these former cases were not as forcefully asserted as the others which were more general, merely citing a single behaviour that should be accepted by Government. For example:

> Housing need to learn that Aboriginal people are still strong in their culture—have their own Law. (Isa 8)

> Government housing mob should change, and they should talk nice to people—not come down hard; and they should be able to say:'You can stay here—you're family.' (Isa 28)

The Aboriginal values around hosting visitors were clearly expressed by many (Isa 6, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 30) with Isa 16 asserting 'We should not have to ask or tell before visitors come' and Isa 27 arguing 'Rules should give tenants enough days to have visitors', and Isa 6 explaining 'When people come from out bush, for rodeo, sports, funerals and stay, we can't knock 'em back'.

Eight tenants (Isa 6, 7, 15, 19, 22, 25, 26, 29) advocated a compromise around conditionality. Some said this was already happening in the way they were adapting their lifestyle to the rules for example 'we make our own rules here … but I do Housing's rules too' (Isa 19), whist others simply said 'need a bit of give and take [on both sides]' (Isa 6).

> Tenant should make ground rules for everyone else. Then everything run smooth. Fit in a little bit with Housing. Listen for both side [and] meet half way. When they do listen, they understand, [but] if white feller tell them, they grumble when they leave—'what these white feller tell me what to do for!' (Isa 25)

> They [Housing] should listen to both sides of living arrangements; we don't want to get forced to live by their rules. (Isa 15)

One insightful interviewee commented on the irony of the changing policy in government:

> Forty years ago they used to say 'We build houses for Aboriginal people; make them suburban people'. Now they're kicking them out! There are those that want to change … but those living in a big family community aren't going to change. (Isa 7)

3.4.2 Findings on tenant support from leaders in the community, in NGOs and Indigenous organisations

Question 10 asked 'Are community leaders helping with meeting the housing rules?' Community leaders who were mentioned in response to this question were: the senior staff of Jimaylya, in particular the Manager, the Counsellor and the Deputy Manager (Isa 26, 11, 16); Catholic Church personnel including the priest (Isa 26, 21); Arthur Peterson Centre personnel (Isa 26); Centacare (Isa 26, 14, 21); Riverbed outreach (Isa 11); Neighbourhood Centre (Isa 21); Kalkadoon Corporation and its Elder/leaders (Isa 20, 27); and Brethren Church leaders (Isa 26). For example, one tenant referred to the support of the Priest in the local Catholic Church: 'Father' is trying to teach young people how to look after houses; to stay off the streets and keep out of trouble' (Isa 28). In these responses there is a skewing to salaried personnel in NGOs rather than a network of Elders from different tribal groups. Many tenants said there were no Aboriginal leaders helping with the rules (Isa 7, 9, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 29).

Question 11 asked 'Are frontline workers within Aboriginal housing organisations helping with meeting the housing rules?' Some reference was made to the Kalkadoon as T.O.s and to Native Title Elders from different tribes work with the police in Mt Isa. Generally, there seemed to be neither dominance nor significant engagement in housing business by tribal leaders including those of the Kalkadoon, the local traditional owners. Mild positive responses were made by some (Isa 7, 12, 20) although more positive from others (Isa 9 and 26). Mention was made again of Jimaylya senior staff (Isa 7, 12), Ngurri Ngurri (Isa 28), and Women's Shelter (Isa 19). There were negligible responses with regards to Aboriginal owner housing organisations due to their general demise.

> [Aboriginal Housing Agency is] very limited. [for example] next door is one of their Aboriginal housing at $300 per week—big [rent] difference, so only limited help. (Isa 20)

3.4.3 Tenant perception of whether government Housing Officers were helping them

Question 12 asked 'Are frontline workers with government housing departments helping with meeting the housing rules?' Six tenants provided a strong positive response to this question (Isa 16, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26); with particular emphasis on how housing staff provide polite responses to queries and problems. For example: 'the case worker is pretty good' (Isa 16), 'they're polite at the counter' (Isa 23), 'they sit down and listen to me' (Isa 25) and 'Housing are kind, straight out with you, tell it like it is, [and] don't bend the rules' (Isa 24). There were also a number of positive responses around flexibility with debts: 'No; they only help to get my rent paid on time; I paid off my big debts in the past' (Isa 21).

Six tenants provided mild positive responses (Isa 8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21), emphasising that Housing Officers provide good solutions to some house problems but not others, or they only visit when a problem arises. However, six tenants provided negative responses to this question (Isa 6, 7, 8, 10, 18, 22), with several complaining Housing Officers never visited them, one raising problems of communication style:

> No, trying to argue and growl me to follow the rules; they don't give advice, like they don't want you to be here. (Isa 22)

3.4.4 Tenant perceptions of Housing Department's aims

Question 14 asked, 'What is the housing department trying to get to happen or achieve?' Three tenants (Isa 7, 15, 18) said the Department was trying to get everyone to look after the houses and keep damage to a minimum, so that the houses remain in good condition. One said the Housing Department was trying to get more homeless people housed (Isa 20). A few tenants said the Department of Housing was trying to achieve a quality of lifestyle for tenants through their responsible use of housing. For example:

> Want Indigenous people to have a better quality of life and be comfortable by respecting housing; look after houses as if it's their own. We all come out of a tin shack and a tent—but must look after that house, [and] be responsible. Will have to wait down the list if we're breached—then back down the camp living. (Isa 26)

Some externalised the imposition of harder conditionality as a problem of the Housing Department and government, for example: 'Tighter—all the rules—they [Housing] want you to live the way they live …' (Isa 19). And: 'they're trying to change the way that Aboriginal people live their life; we know what we are doing but they should leave us do it our way' (Isa 19).

Six interviewees gave sceptical negative responses about what Housing was trying to do. One category of answers was around a discriminatory motive: like 'trying to get more money out of you' (Isa 24), 'want me to move out' (Isa 16), or 'trying to get rid of you, so white people can move in' (Isa 22), or 'give houses to overseas people' (Isa 8). Another (Isa 25) said 'they trying to keep their job; keep themselves happy on inside'. There was clearly a general lack of understanding about the goals of DHPW.

3.5   Summary of findings on tenants' views

Aboriginal tenants who were having the most difficulty with achieving or sustaining tenancies in government housing were disadvantaged due to lack of education, employment and constraints within their social behaviour and those of their visiting kin. The migration and mobility patterns of Aboriginal people from regional and remote communities have exacerbated many social problems in Mt Isa. A proportion of

tenants were suffering physical and economic hardships, including with paying the rent and not feeling supported with house and yard maintenance.

Most tenants considered the rules were getting 'tighter', and that the most difficult to meet related to the ASB of their visitors, both in terms of excessive unapproved numbers and engaging in anti-social behaviour. Such behaviours violated the rules, which they labelled as: 'not too many in the house', 'don't make noise', 'respect neighbours' and 'don't damage house'. However, more than half of the tenants referred to the Aboriginal custom of taking in visitors as a necessary and unavoidable cultural responsibility. Most tenants were of the view that family members were helping with meeting the housing rules, thus indicating a significant degree of social capital.

Apart from hosting visitors and extended family, tenants raise three further particular cultural practices that conflicted with conditionality, viz. use of external hearths, keeping dogs and certain social behaviour including constructs of time and sleeping patterns for children. Several also made responses to the effect that they could adapt or curtail Aboriginal behaviours to fit within the rules, suggesting they were strong householders who could control their visitors including when they got out of hand. Six tenant interviewees asserted that tenancy rules should respect Aboriginal ways of living, versus four who said tenants should comply with rules. On the other hand, eight tenants advocated a compromise around conditionality stating: 'a bit of give and take on both sides'.

The suburb of Pioneer was a site of high Aboriginal social capital, but also a site where social capital was abused and violated when intoxicated people took advantage of the norms of tenant hospitality. Family violence, crowding and alcohol-fuelled behaviour were prevalent and recurring. Consequentially, some tenants with children were attempting to avoid placement in Pioneer or trying to move elsewhere.

Tenant agency was expressed in several important ways. For some, especially those who came through the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre, the first need of their self-agency was to reform their own lifestyles to achieve their well-being goals. A substantial number of tenants perceived housing to be essential to achieve their lifeworld goals around the well-being of their children. A number of responses also emphasised the role of housing in conjunction with their ability to achieve a sense of independence, stability and/or peace for their households.

Most interviewees were not in salaried work nor were they focused on getting a job. Most were recipients of welfare payments through pension or unemployment benefits. Without jobs and other forms of social capital, they had little opportunity to move out of their current rental housing. A few tenants commented on how they rejected or would reject employment opportunities ($80 000 limit rule) so as not to lose their house. Opportunities were further curtailed by the much higher and fixed-price private rentals in the two-speed Mt Isa economy. Home ownership was not a strong or even moderate theme in responses.

Community leaders were said to be helping with meeting the housing rules, but identified leaders were largely salaried Aboriginal and even non-Aboriginal personnel in NGOs rather than a network of Elders from different tribal groups. There seemed to be neither dominance nor significant engagement in housing business by tribal leaders.

Only six of 24 tenants provided a strong positive response to the question on whether frontline workers with government housing departments were helping with meeting the housing rules. Aboriginal tenants' attitudes and behaviours towards the Housing Department ranged from compliance to particular complaints and in some cases to

hostility and resistance. There was clearly a general lack of understanding about the goals of DHPW.

4   GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

Government perspectives on Indigenous social housing have been largely drawn from the interviews with the six front-line staff members employed at the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre of DHPW. Selected responses illustrate relevant aspects of tenancy management for local, non-Indigenous staff, including the policy, the agency of front-line workers and the broader views of government towards tenants and Indigenous and community organisations. The Mt Isa Housing Service Centre is also responsible in certain ways for the management of social housing in regional communities such as the old Mission communities of Gununa (Mornington Island) and Doomadgee, and the rural towns of Normanton, Burketown, Dajarra, Boulia, Camooweal, Cloncurry, Julia Creek and Richmond. Comparative comments will be drawn on some of these places, reflecting the responses of the Housing Officers.

Question 4 of the interview asked 'Are the rules getting tighter or slacking off [weaker]?' All six Housing Officers were unanimous and emphatic that the rules were getting tighter, as did 18 of the 24 tenants (only two tenants thought they were getting weaker). One Housing Officer with eight years of experience in the Mt Isa Area office said 'we use to have different rules for mainstream and ATSI housing, with the [latter] being more flexible and weaker, but now the rules are aligned' (Isa 2). This indicates an earlier policy era when cultural differences were overtly recognised in housing management procedures. However, there was a perception of an imperative for change:

> … [Rules are] getting tougher, and Government has to. Organisations need to be showing to be doing the right thing to get funding. There are more and more people with a need. We have a Register of Needs[1]: health, disabled, etc. There are more and more in the higher need category. And there is less government money and spending. None of the rules are unreasonable I believe (Isa 4).

4.1   Constraints in implementing policy

4.1.1 Tenancy problems due to mobility

Many tenants are highly mobile, moving between towns in the region, staying for varying periods of time and eventually returning. Problems can arise for QHPW over payments for rent and for any damage to the property, especially if the tenant is absent and ceases rent payments or sub-lets the property. One Housing Officer said the most difficult rule to adhere to was unapproved absence from the premises:

> The rule says if you leave the community you must give notice and have approval. It has now got to the stage where they do pay rent when they're away. The Social housing idea is that if you're going away for six months, you don't deserve a state rental house. The Department sends fact sheets out about this. People are slowly starting to tell us about this, even though the forms may not be completed. An example is for someone to come to Isa for a drinking holiday, staying with families. People do go 'Walkabout'. Another example is medical—if the tenant fills in a form, they can reduce the rent in this case for example if a family has to stay in a hostel, their house rent reduces to $11 per week, or if they go for substance rehabilitation, or for dialysis. (Isa 13)

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[1] There are no longer 'wait lists' having been replaced by a 'Register of need'. Categories are: very high need, high, moderate, low, ineligible (A.W. 6 March 2012).

Absenteeism may become less of a management issue as QHPW enforces that conditionality, and tenants realise they can no longer leave a house and expect to be get another tenancy on their return.

The problem of the different drinking styles of visiting Aboriginal people from dry communities was cited by Isa 5:'… people from NT or Mornington Island and Doomadgee who are staying for longer periods especially for drinking at rodeo time; they just drink. Cars full of males come in just for a drinking holiday. Their families are left behind. They don't get to go home sometimes' (Isa 5). Isa 13 also mentioned the phenomenon of visitors on 'drinking holidays' when binge drinking and alcohol abuse occurred.

4.1.2 R&M constraints

Tenant satisfaction often deteriorates when R&M fails to be done promptly by QBuild. The tenants often blame the Housing Officers despite it being out of their control.

> Nothing happens till Q Build fixes the house. Not enough money in the government budget in Isa [to fix houses promptly]. We spend most of the budget on health and safety priorities. Tenants can't manage to get local contractors and pay for the repairs themselves; no capacity. (Isa 5)

4.1.3 Three strikes and the acceptance of anti-social behaviour by tenants

Some constraints were incurred by Housing Officers when implementing the 'three strikes' rule. When asked 'what rules are the most difficult for the tenants to meet?', three Housing Officers cited anti-social behaviour (ASB). Even though Isa 5 said ASB occurred for a 'minority of tenants non-complying over visitors and drinking', Isa 2 said this was nevertheless 'why we go to court the most, and the reason for most evictions and complaints.' Isa 3 emphasised the difficulty of administrating this rule system:

> Three strikes; I'm not a particular fan of it! To use old school terminology —it's like 'wielding a big stick', but also some people relate to that. It's a mish-mash to administer—warnings, breaches, strikes. Even the police have the impression that after three complaints, people are out! So the Department didn't do a good job of educating the stakeholders. (Isa 3)

One officer raised the vexed issue of anti-social arguments and disturbances in the street by intoxicated visitors coming and going between rental households.

> People are of the view that there is 'no shame; not wrong' [to have a disturbance on the street], but can get a 'strike' for that; [there are] disturbances towards neighbours for example people coming from a party at a house. [The tenant] may or may not 'fess up'. (Isa 1)

Here there is embedded in the concept of 'shame', a difference amongst some tenants in cross-cultural values about the tolerance of anti-social behaviour. Another Housing Officer noted the problem of mounting a sound legal case for damage to a house:

> Not many 'strikes' have been issued for wilful damage to a house due to ASB, but you can see the damage as you drive past houses. It is one of the least used for a 'strike', [because] the lack of evidence is a problem—you need a witness. (Isa 1)

It is useful to juxtapose a tenant perception here on the perceived burden that can occur under the three strikes rule system:

> Stop harassing Indigenous people. When have 'three strikes', noise complaint, cops come around. Strikes rules shouldn't be there. Only if do it every day and

night, then get serious. How can I move all my things? Where to go? We can't go to the creek if we have little kids. I had noise complaints from white people who live around here—they don't like black people—make up lies and complain. (Isa 22)

One acutely serious constraint for Housing Officers working in the outer regional townships was said to be the receipt of death (and sorcery) threats following interventions for breaches of rules (Isa 3, 13), an extreme form of ASB. Nevertheless, it was said that 'Safety Plans' had been put in place (Isa 13).

4.1.4 Lifestyle and cultural disparities

When asked 'If tenants' ways of living and practices ran up against the housing rules?', all staff agreed that this was the case, although a number qualified this general response by saying that it was more so the case in some contexts than others and that there was a diversity of lifestyles (Isa 3, 4). For example Isa 3 differentiated the distinctive lifestyles in small rural towns as opposed to Mt Isa, emphasising the presence of yard animals, butchering, circular mobility and oversized households in small towns.

> Not so much in larger towns but in smaller towns, different lifestyles such as pigs, camels, horses in house yard; fire-pits; carcasses—pigs and roos. Tend to have large family gatherings—not just for special occasions. Seen to move around between each other's houses often between Doomadgee, Pompuraaw, Mt Isa, leads to changing households. Base tenant but there are lots of other family members who come and go, which can lead to rent arrears, and anti-social behaviours. They still face cultural issues for example the tenant can't tell relatives that they need to go … Some older ones ask Housing for assistance in this way. We tell them too that calling the police is their option. (Isa 3)

Issues inevitably arose for Housing Officers when people from such rural and remote towns visited or migrated to Mt Isa and brought certain customary behaviours of their rural lifestyle with them. Further culturally distinct behaviours that conflict at times with conditionality were raised by Housing Officers, including frequent hosting of visitors, fast transformation of household size and composition and a possessive attitude towards specific houses as belonging to particular extended families. However most Housing Officers recognised that having large households and frequent household gatherings, and maintaining kinship responsibilities was acceptable and the norm in Aboriginal culture (Isa 2, 3, 4).

> I agree that one culture thing is letting family stay for example when funerals, they stay. They do help out family a lot. They stay a long time. Older people will let a lot stay, even at risk of losing control. (Isa 4)

Nevertheless, there was confusion in some cases as to what were valid cultural norms.

> Not sure about what are Aboriginal cultural norms. Some Aboriginal neighbours will complain about the drinkers and say drinking is not part of Aboriginal culture, while some tenants will say it is part of their culture. (Isa 5)

Whilst alcohol abuse must not be condoned, this response indicates the need for improved understandings of how traditional values may be adapted through processes of cultural change.

4.1.5 Lifestage changes and housing succession

Housing Officers are frequently faced with the issue of matching house sizes to regularly fluctuating household sizes and the dynamics of Aboriginal household growth and decline. One officer explained how this has been overcome at Mornington Island:

> One option at Mornington was to allow succession of tenancy to existing residents [family/descendants] if household size matches. Alternatively, we can offer a new home to a possessive client to break the succession such as an elderly woman who is left with an under-occupied house. (Isa 13)

The same officer said that at Doomadgee, tenant perceptions of ownership of houses still continued very strongly. 'They usually move in before we get there, and the Mayor may back them up, maintaining de facto ownership of houses; [amongst] the older ones a possessive mentality persists.' Again the same tactic was employed of using new houses to break the nexus, that is 'offer them a new house, to get them out of the old house so it can be rented to someone else' (Isa 13). However, a death of a householder could automatically catalyse succession of the tenancy to other family members if they are in residence: 'If a tenant dies and their house is then vacant at Doomadgee, a relative will claim as theirs or the Mayor will allocate to them' (Isa 13). Isa 13 went on to explain how in remote communities early socio-spatial patterns established in Mission times have resulted in these possessive attitudes and this remains a problem that is exacerbated by feuding families. The problem was noted to be acute in Burketown by another Officer: 'Burketown is a different place; family groups have a very high sense of ownership [of houses] there' (Isa 3).

This possessiveness trait has also been noted of community people migrating into Mt Isa, with reference to the custom of 'gifting of a tenancy; handing their house over to a relative out of respect' (Isa 2). Another example is the Yallambie housing precinct which is the contemporary urban transformation of the old Mt Isa Town Camp from the mid-20th century; perceived extended family rights in this area remain very strong for many. Some families have been there at least 40 to 50 years.

> Family solidarity occurs in Yallambie and there is even less shame in Yallambie than in the suburbs. … it's acceptable to yell at people in street. (Isa 1)

Instances of conflicts between Aboriginal lifeways and housing conditionality therefore present a major set of constraints for Housing Officers as well as tenants.

4.1.6 Compromise on Aboriginal ways of living

When asked 'Should the rules respect Aboriginal ways of living, or should Aboriginal ways of living change to meet the rules?', Housing Officers were equally divided. Thus a majority of 14 Officers and tenants said that a compromise was needed (11 tenants, three officers), whereas seven said Aboriginal ways have to change (four tenants, three officers). And only six tenants said the rules should 'respect' Aboriginal ways. In trying to impose one set of conditionalities across the region, some Housing Officers noted the structural disparities in the rules across the various settlements due to socio-economic and cultural differences.

> A tough one I think. You have got to have one set of rules for everyone. But if you look at remote communities, they haven't introduced the income [threshold] limits. A brief has been written why they shouldn't. They have a different way of living compared to the city. (Isa 2)

4.1.7 Housing Officers' perceptions of Aboriginal community leaders and family support

Question 9 asked 'Are family members helping with meeting the housing rules?' Housing staff were divided on this issue, most opting to say 'some do' and 'some don't'. In contrast, the majority of tenants (15 out of 24) said 'they do', with four saying 'some do and some don't'. Some Housing Officers commented on the declining influence of Elders. For example:

> If we do have trouble, we are mindful of Elders if they lose control. Respect for Elders is failing. Younger ones are showing less respect for Elders when they are drunk; they may wreck a house. (Isa 4)

> Elders say they don't respect us like we did to ours. There's no repercussions to them if they're not a tenant—they know they won't get into trouble. (Isa 2)

Most staff gave more complex responses with 'some helping' and 'some not', or will 'help in certain contexts but not others'.

> If there's a contentious issue, family don't help, but with more general issues, mostly family do help. If there's a breach [of the rules], most families are not willing to help [mainly because they think that] a lot of family are inherently 'lazy buggers' on Centrelink and living out their lives doing nothing …. (Isa 3)

Some even indicated irresponsible older people from bush communities can be a problem for responsible younger tenants.

> Big problem is older people visitors lobbing up. Think they can drink and do as they please. Younger [householders] are vulnerable. (Housing Officer Workshop 1 August 2013)

Isa 1 responded by saying 'No it's usually the reverse—family members make a mess, and usually can't get family to help', but then gave an example of a grandmother who was very strict with two young adults in her household: 'If an Elder there, it can be a massive help sometimes; there are quite a few matriarchs as tenants'. Isa 1 also agreed with tenant Isa 24's analysis of Mt Isa versus Cloncurry, that Isa is a 'big city' with far more danger and risk.

Housing Officers agreed with the idea of there being hub households in Mt Isa, led by strong matriarchs who may look after all their grandchildren. The term 'natural helpers' for such Aboriginal matriarchs was employed by one public servant (H.R., DOCS, 1 August 2013). In Normanton, it was reported that older females were training younger women in the household maintenance skills. It was also noted that when a stable householder gets old and frail, then the household stability can be lost, and similarly when a strong householder dies unexpectedly. An example was given in Normanton, whereby a male authority figure died, then the wife couldn't cope (Officer Workshop 1 August 2013). There is an issue of the need for the facilitating of succession planning of such tenancies. Only one Housing Officer answered in the unqualified affirmative concerning strong community-based leadership, albeit in relation to the situation at Gununa (Mornington Island).

> Yes, with rent. It's $120 a week [flat rate] and all income earners contribute to rent. The residents at Mornington Island come to the office when they move in and volunteer to pay rent. There is a norm established around this. We talk to head tenant and get what their requirements are with respect to contributions and contributors. The tenant asks Housing to facilitate this. We then talk to them (the other householders) with the permission of the tenant. In 90 per cent

of agreements, tenants agree. The converse is to say: 'You're not helping out, so you move out' says tenant. (Isa 13)

When asked 'If community leaders were helping with meeting the housing rules', four staff answered in the affirmative whereas only nine in the negative (seven tenants and two staff). But this 2:1 (yes:no) response did not reflect the overall staff views about declining community leadership. A range of Aboriginal individuals were mentioned as leaders but either they had passed away (deceased), moved to the coast or their capacities were now seen to be limited for various reasons (e.g. becoming quite elderly and infirm). One initiated man from Doomadgee was recognised as a potential peer mentor but when he spoke up at a tenants' meeting 'nobody wanted to take his advice or mentoring, and he got depressed' (Isa 1). Examples were given of apathy amongst middle-aged householders who had a potential to be leaders:

> Everyone in Pioneer is complacent. Take the examples of [x] and [y]; they are passionate about land rights, but not other things. (Isa 1)

One Housing Officer gave an example in a rural town (Normanton) of a wife suffering from DV at the hands of her drug dealer husband and family did not intervene. 'Don't get involved when it's DV; people just defer to the man. Nobody seems to step in to help the woman' (Isa 4). However, another positive example was pointed out in Normanton:

> In some instances, in Normanton a group of Elders (especially women) have strong connection with family members; and these older women will often intervene. Cultural leaders have influence; [whereas] leaders in charge of organisations or agencies don't have much influence over the community. (Isa 3)

4.1.8 Loss of socio-spatial control in Pioneer

In traditional or classical Aboriginal lifestyle, social capital was regularly structured, controlled and reproduced through socio-spatial structures whereby social units in large-scale settlements articulated and conducted themselves in their spatial behaviour so as to create an order that expressed and reinforced their social identity and kinship links and responsibilities. Although latent in certain urban settings, such patterns can assume prominence when they become dysfunctional. Of particular focus throughout the IMYRP project in Mt Isa was the situation in the infamous suburb of Pioneer. Known locally as 'the Bronx', this suburb contains the highest concentration of Aboriginal residents in Mt Isa (see maps in Figures 3 & 4). This had been noted in a previous AHURI study carried out by AERC personnel. The Final Report of the AHURI Crowding Study (Memmott et al. 2012) identified the occurrence of a state of neighbourhood crowding (as well as the presence of large households and some household crowding) in Pioneer. The report shows that this was characterised by a relatively high density of rental housing occupied by Aboriginal people, exacerbated by high visitation numbers and forms of anti-social street behaviour. This all has the effect of impinging on and de-stabilising tenancies.

For example, in the last year of data collection (2014), a large-scale brawl erupted at rodeo time in a Pioneer park spilling into the street and involving some 200 people. The protagonists were Alyawarr families from the NT communities of Alpurrurulam, Epenarra and Canteen Creek. The police responded by closing off the street. Various local households were impacted (Isa 1).

Incidents such as this are relatively commonplace. Another example citable from confidential sources, is the phenomenon of inter-family reverberating feuds, whereby two family gangs will prey upon one another due to an incapacity to resolve a

grievance. A desire for ongoing 'pay-back' can cause a state of intermittent local siege, fear and disruption in the neighbourhoods of the protagonists' households, not to mention the damage done to their own houses during clashes. This phenomenon involves the conscription of extended family members to build numbers in the often physical clashes that occur.

One senior Housing Officer pointed out the very high proportion of children and youths in Pioneer with some 500 in the 0–18 years old range. Of the older youth, most are not employed, and they gather in the parks and streets of Pioneer and seek peer companionship (B.S. 3 June 2013). At the time of release of this report in mid-2012, the local office of the State Housing Department was motivated to carry out their own household survey to check further the extent of house crowding and to seek tenant views on how to improve the quality of households.

The police installed an office in Short St as a local 'Police Beat' base, indicating that the problems in Pioneer must have been emerging as early as 2005 (A.W. 31 July 2013). One senior Housing Officer reflected on the emergence of the problem:

> The Pioneer population probably increased since 2006, in 2011 Census. The majority of public housing is in Pioneer with only 19 ATSI houses. We found too many Indigenous families in Pioneer as a response to workshops. We are promoting private sale of houses, especially smaller houses in Pioneer, to thin out the stock. But, we do not sell the larger homes; keep if they are four bedrooms. (A.W. 6 March 2012)

Staff considered and in some cases implemented some other interventions in Pioneer to increase house pride such as an R&M drive, and providing paint for residents to individualise their house colour schemes. This process was guided by a regular tenants' group. Unfortunately, attendance at these meetings fell off and the Housing Office was receiving regular requests from tenants to transfer out of the suburb due to the intoxicated groups of youth on the streets. Another innovative action in Pioneer was 'Pride in our Community Day' a one-off clean-up event, which will be described further in Section 6.3.

In a Housing Officer Workshop (1 August 2013), it was stated that Aboriginal people in Pioneer say to them 'you put too many people in this suburb', blaming DHPW for the neighbourhood crowding issue.[2] The purposeful placing or dispersal of people in the town's suburbs is a critical planning issue with aggregation and 'segregation' of ATSI people given by the staff as controversial and undesirable. At the same time, it was said: 'But we see a lot of tenants who won't be on their own' that is a single parent or young couple who cannot handle having a house that is not proximate to their wider family.

4.1.9 Alternate Commonwealth land lease conditions having a differential impact on housing management in two remote discrete communities

An interview in Mt Isa Housing office of the officer in charge of housing at Mornington Island (MI) and Doomadgee has revealed some salient findings, because of differences in the way 40 year leases have been implemented in these two communities. At MI, the Aboriginal Shire Council has handed over full control to DHPW and management is proceeding very well with low arrears and a reduction of the historical possessiveness of particular rental houses by certain families. The latter is achieved when a household shrinks to one (usually an elderly woman) and the family link with the house is then broken by Housing offering the householder a brand

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[2] Despite the extensive problems in Pioneer, no tenants were in arrears in the ATSI stock, and in the RGS stock, eight were in arrears (A.W. 6 March 2012).

new one-bedroom unit, thereby allowing better match of household size to house size. Nevertheless, house succession within the extended family is supported if the family numbers in the household make sense. In contrast, at Doomadgee due to a different leasing arrangement the council have veto power over the Housing Officers concerning decisions about tenants including eviction proposals requested by the DHPW. The council often allow a tenant to stay in their house, recognising their territorial 'rights' in the house, but thereby accruing immense unsatisfactory arrears debts.

In addition to the Residential Tenancies Act's general set of conditionalities being relevant at Gununa and Doomadgee, Isa 13 outlined:

> (a) the State Tenancy Agreement (18C) in which Department is the landlord under the 40-year lease arrangement, or (b) the Agency Appointed Lease Agreement (18A) (the Department of Housing is agent to the council). Mornington Island is all (a), whereas Doomadgee is a mix of (a) and (b). Breaks down into policies and legislations of the Department, which then translates into tenancy agreement rules. (Isa 13)

4.1.10 Constraints on using Aboriginal staff in housing management

Unlike the situation in Tennant Creek, there were not any Aboriginal persons employed as front-line workers in the Mt Isa Housing Area Office, during the period of interviewing, although this changed at the end of the interview period with the employment of one Aboriginal woman. The non-Aboriginal workers were adamant that in the past, Aboriginal employees who had taken on this role had fallen under excessively stressful pressure from related tenants in dealing with their day-to-day problems. In the Housing Officer Workshop (1 August 2013), it was said that those Aboriginal Staff members who had been formerly employed were not interested in or very knowledgeable of cultural factors and were living like Europeans. These Housing Officers also defended their own capacities to deliver an effective service. One officer said: 'We are very protective of [Aboriginal] tenants and we do have relationships with them' (1 August 2013).

> We do get a lot of flack because none of us are Indigenous—I don't think it matters. We do have some understanding. We treat everyone the same. Problems are in all of society, and we are mindful of a suicide; so if people want to move [because of such a reason], we find them a new house. (Isa 4)

An interesting comparison was raised by the Housing Officer who administered housing at the remote (ex-Mission) community of Gununa on Mornington Island. Here it was reported that the all-Aboriginal (or at times majority Aboriginal) council preferred the housing management services to be provided by non-residents as they were acutely aware of the problems and disputes that would be unavoidable due to nepotism arising if local people were employed. (Here we see a potential negative impact of Aboriginal social capital.) At Doomadgee, a female Aboriginal Housing Officer did much of the routine work, 'but she does not do complex socio-political dealings like rental arrears or chasing compliance' (Isa 13). (It will be seen later that this strategy of adjusting roles between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff has been developed further in the Mt Isa Housing Service office.)

4.2   Agency of frontline workers

Frontline Housing Officers are critical in determining how well the rules are working for tenants. While the majority of Indigenous tenants try to abide by the rules, many require individual support; such as need for critical information on rules and practical advice, such as on cleaning services.

A lot of tenants don't have general living skills. At the time of their house application they are not put through a living skills course, such as vacuum, mop, wash walls, etc. [Gives an examples of a tenant.] Gave her a week's warning and then she did it. We had to instruct her how to use cleaning products. An estimate of the housing stock that is well kept, versus not so well kept, is 60:40. (Isa 1)

The officers saw this as a communication strategy too, understanding that it can be an effective way to build trust between tenants and government. Nevertheless, the officers did not report a lot of success in generating change in tenant attitudes and behaviour.

Difficulty is in getting around to everybody in our visits and checking up and following up. Have great stories about houses that were atrocious, unhygienic, what's acceptable … process of explaining, cleaning hints, and so on; then it's really great to see a house spotless … spotless! We praise them! We have not evicted anyone yet. (Isa 4)

4.2.1 Social capital between agencies

During the early period of the IMYRP project in Mt Isa, social capital was building between various government and non-government agencies. A recent Mt Isa homelessness strategy, 'Sheltering the Isa', had been initiated by the Australian Government but was hosted through a collaboration between a state government department and an NGO (DoC n.d.). Most of the homeless people in Mt Isa are Aboriginal campers and drinkers in the Leichhardt River. This strategy proceeded via regular meetings between the many NGOs, and government agencies operating in the social services/welfare/housing sectors in Mt Isa. Of particular salience was the role of the Topsy Harry Jimaylya Centre for the homeless, which will be described further in Chapter 5.

Parallel to these meetings was another series of meetings sometimes hosted by DHPW, the Integrated Case Management (ICM) meetings to coordinate the case management of problem tenancies. Agencies could confidentially compare observations and findings on problematic Aboriginal families or individuals who were in conflict with or otherwise coming to the attention of multiple agencies due to the complex nature of their socio-economic and health problems, and thereby develop a coordinated plan to respond with services for such individuals.

More difficult social problems were addressed at ICM meetings, for example that of street kids was raised by a Senior Housing Manager:

But another 30 + kids who have no fear and are 8 to 16 years olds. They have no fear of police, do breaking and entering, wearing hoodies. Discussed at inter-agency ICM Meetings. These are our clients at the hard end. At ICMs we openly declare the name of a person to determine if duplication of services and if complementary services are happening for a single client. Some clients have many services focusing on them but to no avail. (B.S. 1 August 2013)

Within these networks, despite the absence of Aboriginal staff in the Housing Office, the presence of local Aboriginal staff in other agencies provided powerful voices in the recognition spaces that emanated. There was a definite sense in the responses of Housing Officers (e.g. Isa 1, 5), of them seeking solutions for clients by conscripting assistance from or referring to other agencies.

Centacare have helped with 'three strikes'—spreading info and education of tenants. Pioneer police have done similarly on 'three strikes'. (Isa 1)

4.2.2 Tenancy placement and social conflicts

Agency of Housing Officers is demonstrated in their moving of tenants to dismantle social conflicts and family violence. One relevant category of tenancy problems is that of released prisoners who have to live in Mt Isa and report regularly for their parole. Some are in transit on their way back to remote communities, including those in the Northern Territory, but have to remain in Mt Isa until fulfilling their parole conditions.

> Correction releases need an address, but the Corrections Department seem to have a 'dump and run' syndrome. Case of a male who had already bashed a female spouse and returned from prison to live in Mt Isa to find his 'ex' was living next door. His circumstances were not checked in through Housing; there is 'no pre-check with local residents. (B.S. 3 June 2013)

Inter-family disputes also require intervention:

> The fight that made the papers was [the A and B families]. Complaints were made by the neighbours and public. We transferred one family to Cairns; they got a beautiful home, but then went back to Doomadgee, where they're now running amuck. They wanted transfers. They say, 'they walk past my house, look in and swear'. (A.W. 6 March 2012)

Transferral of tenancies involved knowledge of 'a problem tenants' connections back to their bush community.

> We don't like transferring in Mt Isa, especially over DV—it's best to transfer people to out of town [i.e. from Mt Isa to a rural town]. (A.W. 6 March 2012)

However, social conflicts are likely to be happening even in remote communities and require agency in addressing socio-spatial relationships and house possessiveness.

> We have overcome neighbourhood clustering at Mornington Island but not at Doomadgee. At Doomadgee can't superimpose [family X] and [family Y] (in constant conflict). At Mornington, the council wanted to cluster [family tenancies], but we didn't go down that road. A wait-list person is asked; they may knock back the offer if feuding with neighbours. (Isa 13)

4.2.3 Peak visitor period strategy

Housing Officers have initiated a number of strategies to support tenants during key periods, such as Rodeo, Show and Christmas, when their visitor numbers peak and make their tenancies vulnerable.

> Rodeo strategy with police. We ask 'any family coming? need help?' We [staff] drive around at night. It is volunteer work, so not official. We cannot confront people. Only if they come to talk to us or flag us down. (A.W. 31 July 2013)

This is an example of DHPW Housing Officers implementing a proactive informal service that was not a formal service but which clearly addressed a service gap.

4.2.4 Flexibility recognised as a key principle

Housing Officers all emphasised the need for flexibility in interpreting and applying the rules of tenancy.

> Has to be 'give and take' because not all rules fit all circumstances and there will always be exceptions. We try to fit our policies to circumstances as much as possible, and take families into consideration. If we need to put case to the Regional Director, we do, to try to get the best outcome for everyone. (Isa 3)

> Overcrowding is a hard one. We do try to be flexible. But need to consider conditions of homes (wear and tear) and whether neighbours can cope. We go on a case-by-case basis. (Isa 5)

One Housing Officer gave a specific example of attempts to support an Aboriginal matriarch with a large 'hub household':

> [Person X], a foster carer, nine children, a heap of daughters, extra people staying there often. She had a three B/R house; then we gave her a four B/R one. Tried to get her a brick home to offset wear and tear but we've not found one yet. She had a room set up in her car park. We told her although she had overcrowding, she must not disturb neighbours … she agreed. She had Lake Nash visitors to feed and shower, but has no breaches. She's able to stand up to drinkers. (Isa 5)

Flexibility was also found to be being implemented by Housing Officers in the remote discrete communities.

> Because [rent payment] compliance is so high at Mornington Island, our philosophy is let's see what we can do in other areas [i.e. be more flexible with the rules]. (Isa 13)

A converse type of flexibility was to go harder than softer in particular demanding cases.

> Re-policing rules for at-risk tenancies: We go harder on them. We need to support tenancy stability. We have to give tough love. (A.W. 6 March 2012)

4.3 Towards tenants and IOs

In this section we outline the perceptions of the Housing Officers about the Department's housing goals, and the goals of individual rules. This is compared to their perceptions of what the tenants see as their goals.

4.3.1 *Housing Officers' perceptions of the intent of their department in relation to tenants*

Question 12 asked 'Are frontline workers with government housing departments helping with meeting the housing rules?' As might be expected, all housing staff answered in the affirmative to this, whereas 12 of the 24 tenants agreed and seven disagreed. Most Housing Officers mentioned their educational role (Isa 2, 4, 1, 5).

> We educate. Give heads up on issues such as watering hours so as to avoid Court fines. Do regular home visit. This time of year people get stuck here in the wet [visitors from outer region]. We give out a pamphlet. (Isa 2)

Question 14 asked 'What is the housing department trying to get to happen or achieve?' A diverse set of responses was obtained to this question variously emphasising attributes of pride, happiness, sustainability and overcoming need.

> Pride in the community, definitely; and people living happily by following the rules. (Isa 1)

> Everyone to pay rent and look after their houses and live happily together. (Isa 5)

> Trying to achieve sustainable tenancies that benefit everyone involved. (Isa 3)

> To provide sustainable housing for the most in-need Queenslanders. (Isa 2)

However, there was also a view that policy prescribed that once the tenant was no longer needy, the tenant then had to move out of social housing into private rental or home ownership.

> To give people a hand-up or a start, and to help vulnerable people in society. (Isa 4)

> The house is not a lifetime thing anymore; it was your house for life once. (Isa 2)

This finding of diversity also implies there is a need for a clearer shared common understanding of such amongst Housing Officers so that the department's goals can be unambiguously conveyed to tenants.

4.3.2 Values underlying Housing Officers' views about the purposes of the rules for the tenants

Question 2 of the survey unpacked intention or purpose further by asking 'What is the intended purpose or objective of each of these rules?' With respect to the rule of *looking after the house and keeping it undamaged, tidy, clean*, a mixture of reasons was given, including the need to conform to a social norm of pride of ownership of a house. (This last purpose is quite pertinent as it was also echoed in a significant number of tenant responses.) Thus one officer said:

> It's a matter of public perception. You shouldn't be able to tell it's a government house. Need to be following council by-laws. Having pride in your home. Contributing to the community. If the yards look good, the whole town looks good. It's about appreciating home and pride. (Isa 4)

> Housing wants to instil pride in ownership of a property. We explain that it shows other people about you, and that you should be proud. (Isa 3)

Several housing staff provided a composite set of reasons for this rule:

> A high concentration of social housing can have a flow-on effect for example 'They don't keep their property clean and tidy so why should I.' You can then sometimes see a pattern in a street. (Isa 3)

> Improving the lives of people in remote communities; having a better lifestyle, and this unpacks into health issues, schooling, pride, responsibility. (Isa 13)

There is a rationale here of a composite set of outcomes to generate a holistic sense of well-being or quality of life. It includes the broader aspect of establishing and promoting social norms and values.

Embedded in the responses to the rule of *respecting one's neighbours* is the issue of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people co-residing in the Mt Isa suburbs as well as other rural towns in the region.

> To maintain peace in the neighbourhood. In smaller communities, problems can impinge on the whole community. In larger communities, there can be flow-on of the 'image' of social housing tenants. Can lead to perception in the community that social housing tenants are in some way inferior. A large group living in one house are often viewed as unacceptable. (Isa 3)

This suggests an attempt to homogenise the image of households and houses in particular neighbourhoods and to influence social norms around public behaviour in social housing.

Longer-serving Housing Officers were able to point to changing policy around conditionality as it was implemented and then possibly relaxed or abandoned if it did not work. One example was the *prior residency in Queensland* rule.

> Have to show a Queensland residency [to be eligible for tenancy]. This is less strict now; [an applicant] had to show 6 months residency in Queensland when I started, but you had to prove that, which may be why we got rid of it. Now just have to show current residency only—a person can just go to Centrelink, and change their address. Our tenants get conflicted when they see Lake Nash mob getting houses. (Isa 2)

Isa 2 also said the purpose of the *failing to reside in the rental house* rule was 'to utilise the housing stock … we had issues with tenant sub-letting or renting another property in another place'. Here they are referring to the situation of individuals having two tenancies, one in Mt Isa and one in a more remote community and only paying rent in the one house in which they are residing at the time. This is a recurring issue linked to regional circular mobility, and we found a reciprocal perception amongst Housing Officers in Tennant Creek who became similarly aware of their absentee tenants acquiring a rental house in Mt Isa.

Isa 4 provided a detailed account of the purpose of the *household members declaration* rule:

> The purpose is to ensure that everyone is making a contribution to rent. This is for overcrowding purposes assessment and under-occupancy purposes assessment. And persuading others to contribute to rent, so as to make it fair on the tenant; often an older [householder], will get ripped off by younger ones. There is a limit to a degree. They can stay for 28 days before declaring visitors. It is also proof that applicants need larger housing; if they are in an overcrowded house, this info is used in assessing their need for making application. So we get them to put in their own application. We know there can be problems in over-crowded houses—drinking, partners causing trouble. For instance in Camooweal—wear and tear there on houses—too many people. We do take into account gender and age, for example an older boy and younger boy in same bedroom is not acceptable—we measure the entitlement. (Isa 4)

The same Housing Officer provided an explanation of the purpose of the *three strikes rule* which was said to be more about public education:

> Anti-Social Behaviour—we have always been able to breach people for this. Only thing that's new is the 'three strikes' rule, which makes it all clearer. What it does is to bring it to public attention; provides education for tenants and the public … to show we do react to problems. It has a political function also. (Isa 4)

4.3.3 Housing staff perceptions of tenants' housing goals

Question 16 asked the Housing Officers 'What is the housing tenant trying to get to happen or achieve?' Five of the six interviewees offered a view on this. Two emphasised safety and security as goals:

> Most tenants are looking for the same things—safe, secure and sustainable tenancy—somewhere to live that suits their needs. (Isa 3)

> Everyone's goal is to be safe and secure (independence and privacy are also main goals), and in a healthy environment—this last one is our perception. (Isa 13)

Only one went to the potential issue of clashing goals arising from conditionalities:

> They're trying to abide by ASB policy and reduce the number of visitors and keep clean—but they don't really understand why we're so strict because they are used to living that way and think we are over-reacting. But they want the house—that's the bottom line. They don't understand why we're kicking up such a stink. (Isa 1)

One highlighted the problem of unemployment saying: 'generally they're just trying to exist [but] they get discouraged because lots are unemployed' (Isa 4), whilst another stated that it was the tenant's goal to obtain employment: 'Hopefully get their life on track; roof over head for kids; send kids to school; and get a job' (Isa 2).

4.4 Summary of key findings

The six Housing Officers were unanimous that the rules of housing conditionality were getting tighter, (as were 18 of the 24 tenants). They were all of the view that they were helping tenants meet the housing rules.[3] Some recognised earlier policy eras when Aboriginal cultural differences were overtly recognised in housing management procedures. Longer-serving Housing Officers were able to point to changing policy around conditionality as it was implemented and then possibly relaxed or abandoned if it did not work; but overall there was a perception of an imperative for change.

Housing Officers experienced a range of constraints in implementing the current policy agenda. The high circular mobility of many tenants and their visitors generated problems of calculating rent payments, visitor damage to property, unapproved tenant absenteeism, and cessation of rent payments or sub-letting property during absenteeism; also the problem of the different drinking styles of visiting Aboriginal people from outer-regional dry communities, including higher levels of alcohol abuse.

Tenant satisfaction often deteriorated when R&M failed to be done promptly by QBuild, in which case the tenants often blamed the Housing Officers despite it being out of their control. ASB extended to death threats in a minimal number of cases. Some constraints were also incurred by Housing Officers implementing the three strikes rule, including the legal challenge problem of mounting a sound legal case for damage to a house, and encountering at times a difference in values amongst some tenants about the tolerance of anti-social behaviour involving different concepts of shame.

Instances of conflicts between Aboriginal lifeways and housing conditionality presented a major set of constraints for Housing Officers (as well as the tenants). Such culturally distinct behaviours included frequent hosting of visitors, fast transformation of household size and composition and a possessive attitude towards specific houses as belonging to particular extended families. House sizes had to be regularly matched to regularly fluctuating household sizes and the dynamics of Aboriginal household growth and decline.

Housing Officers were equally divided as to whether the rules should respect Aboriginal ways of living, or Aboriginal ways of living should change to meet the rules. Some noted the structural disparities in the rules across the various settlements due to socio-economic and cultural differences.

Housing staff were also divided on whether family members were helping with meeting the housing rules (in contrast, with tenants who said they did), but most agreed they will 'help in certain contexts but not others'. Most agreed community

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[3] This was reflected in the low DHPW arrears rate for the region. In March 2012, the rate was a little below the state target of 4 per cent (p.c. A.W. 6 March 2012).

leaders were helping with meeting the housing rules, but said there was apathy amongst middle-aged householders who had a potential to be leaders. Housing Officers agreed with supporting hub households in Mt Isa, led by strong matriarchs ('natural helpers') who may look after many children and grandchildren.

A serious constraint was the state of neighbourhood crowding (notwithstanding household crowding) in the suburb of Pioneer, characterised by a relatively high density of rental housing occupied by Aboriginal people. This is exacerbated by high visitation numbers, and forms of anti-social street behaviour impinging on and de-stabilising tenancies. Staff had implemented various interventions to increase house pride. However Aboriginal people in Pioneer sometimes accused them of putting too many people in the suburb.

One possible constraint was the absence of any Aboriginal persons employed as front-line workers in the Mt Isa Housing Area Office, during the period of interviewing Housing Officers defended their own capacities to deliver an effective service and were of the view that past Aboriginal employees had fallen under excessively stressful pressure from related tenants in dealing with their day-to-day problems.

The agency of Housing Officers was critical in determining how well the rules were working for tenants. While the majority of Indigenous tenants tried to abide by the rules, many require individual supports; for example, need for critical information on rules and practical advice, such as on cleaning services. The Officers saw this as a communication strategy too, understanding that it can be an effective way to build trust between tenants and government. agency of Housing Officers was demonstrated in their moving of tenants to dismantle social conflicts and family violence, and in initiating a number of strategies to support tenants during key periods when their visitor numbers peaked and their tenancies thereby become vulnerable. Housing Officers all recognised flexibility as a key principle in interpreting and applying the rules of tenancy.

During the early period of the IMYRP project in Mt Isa, social capital was building between various government and non-government agencies (e.g. at ICM meetings), seeking solutions for clients by conscripting assistance from or referring to other agencies. Within these networks, the presence of local Aboriginal staff in other agencies provided powerful voices in the recognition spaces that emanated.

A diverse set of responses was obtained to the question 'What was the housing department trying to achieve', including attributes of tenant pride, happiness, sustainability and overcoming need. The presumed intended purpose of particular rules invoked a rationale of a composite set of outcomes to generate a holistic sense of well-being or quality of life, including (a) the broader aspect of establishing and promoting social norms and values, especially pride of ownership of a house and (b) respecting one's neighbours where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were co-residing in the Mt Isa suburbs. There was a sense of an attempt by Housing Officers to influence Aboriginal households in particular neighbourhoods to conform to mainstream behavioural norms in their housing practices. However, when asked 'what the housing tenant was trying to achieve', Housing Officers emphasised safety and security as goals.

Figure 6: Public housing in Mt Isa

Source: Daphne Nash

5   INDIGENOUS ORGANISATION PERSPECTIVES

5.1   Background

As noted earlier, there were no Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) operating effectively in Mt Isa during our study. The lack of ICHO capacity was commented on by the DHPW Housing Officers. When asked whether frontline workers within Aboriginal housing organisations were helping to meet the housing rules, none said 'yes' and all inferred this question was not relevant in Mt Isa. Mention was made of the role of DHPW in dealing with the demise of various Aboriginal Housing Co-ops in the wider region, and at times taking over management of their stock.

> [DHPW] has taken over quite a few Indigenous organisations. They aren't very effective and most of them have closed such as at Cloncurry, Mitakoodi were trying to evict (for rent arrears; state of property and bad behaviour). A sit-in and riot led to government intervention. Mt Isa Housing Officers went to assist. On the other hand, properties were poorly maintained so Mitakoodi were not supporting tenants except their own family. 'Mitakoodi' is in receivership. In Normanton, 'Bynoe' still has its housing stock; that's the only one that's operating well. 'Jimberella' [in Dajarra] still operating but not sure how well. In Boulia we [DHPW] have taken over from 'Burke and Wills'. In Hughenden, 'Yumba' is in receivership or administration. (Isa 4)

The Mitakoodi Co-op stock was also being managed by a real estate agency for a period during the IMYRP project. In Mt Isa, Jalanga Housing Co-op had been operating some time prior to the IMYRP project, but when the Chairman died, the stock was also handed over to a real estate agency (Jimaylya 27 September 2013).

> These houses [Jalanga, Mitakoodi] are in disarray; they need a lot of R and M. (Isa 2)

> [Another] Indigenous provider in Mt Isa went into receivership. They sold stock and land to pay off the debt and get out of receivership. The stock has been handed back to the organisation now, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Corporation for Welfare Services; it started in 1985 and bought 30 properties. (B.S. 3 June 2013)

> There was no training for [ICHOs in] remote communities; they were set up to fail. (B.S. 3 June 2013)

Thus, at the time of conducting the IMYRP project, the era of the independent ICHO in every town in NWQ was fast coming to an end. This was partly due to the political pressures initiated under the national neo-Liberalism policies that saw the wind up of ICHOs that were not reaching particular standards, and their replacement with a mainstreaming approach to housing management services (Milligan et al. 2010, Habibis et al. 2015). The policies were continued under Labor and executed by state and territory governments.

Over the same recent years (2000s, 2010s) a series of non-Indigenous controlled and funded service providers has emerged including the well-established church group Centacare, the Salvation Army who had taken over the Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House (KASH) and some government funded centres such as the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre for homeless people, the Mt Isa Neighbourhood Centre, and two women's shelters were also operating with varying configurations of Indigenous staff and management. These and other providers had achieved a good record of assisting Indigenous clients into housing in Mt Isa and working in collaboration at times with the

QHPW. The Jimaylya Centre presents a special case due to its internal Indigenous management and staffing that persuades us to deal with it as an ICHO.

5.2   The Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in Mt Isa

The Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre (JTHC) is one of three key centres for homeless Indigenous people in Mt Isa, the others mainly being an overnight shelter for intoxicated people, the Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre (APSCC) known as 'AP', and the Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House (KASH), which runs an alcohol treatment program.

Through its experience of service delivery in Mt Isa, the then Queensland Government Department of Community Services (DoCs) recognised a gap in services for homeless Indigenous people with long-term substance abuse problems and established the Jimaylya Centre in 2003. The JTHC operates on three core principles: accommodation leading to housing; harm minimisation; and cultural maintenance and the building of social capital and resilience, translating these operating principles into effective service delivery.

JTHC relies on a wide network for inter-agency cooperation as part of its case-management approach, conducted by its Counsellor for individual clients, including in the fields of homeless outreach, health, substance abuse, housing, employment, training and legal aid.

> The success that Jimaylya has had in assisting and rehabilitating Indigenous alcoholics [into rental housing] may be attributable to a range of factors contained within their methods—both formalised, as in access to services, as well as the effects of less tangible and more qualitative factors, such as the dignity that come from cultural affirmation in an openly Indigenous-centred place, and the 'tough love' style of administering the Centre rules by the Manager. Although the Centre does not formally focus on emotional and spiritual well-being, the staff and management share an holistic approach to health that is supported by Indigenous healthy authorities. (Memmott & Nash 2012, p.34–35)

After admission, the process for homeless clients who may be sleeping rough is from crisis accommodation, to singles accommodation, to accommodation in a Jimaylya house and then to a public rental house in Mt Isa—the pathway out (Memmott & Nash 2012, p.35). Accommodation includes a number of outdoor semi-enclosed sleeping shelters; the 'yudu' or single men's quarters (single rooms); single women's quarters (dormitory-style sleeping); a three-bedroom house for couples in crisis; and, six two-bedroom houses used by clients transitioning to rental housing.

The Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre (JTHC) in Mt Isa integrates the front-line treatment of Indigenous alcoholism with responses to homelessness. The Centre is unusual in that it not only aims to provide crisis accommodation with the longer term goal to facilitate clients through various stages of housing and eventually to stable urban public housing tenancies, but the JTHC also incorporates a managed drinking program for alcoholic clients. The managed drinking policy at Jimaylya is not without its critics (e.g. Isa 26), with the alternate ideologies of abstinence and moderation in regular debate.

Jimaylya management ensures DHPW Housing Officers run workshops for their clients on tenancy conditionality, so that they are well informed about such before they transit into rental housing in the town. For example, one interviewed tenant was unusually well versed, which he attributed to a recent tenancy seminar at the Jimaylya Centre: 'Identify and report damage (must supply own light bulbs); not allowed to drill

into walls to put photos up; can't paint or do your own maintenance—has to be a contractor tradesman [etc.]' (Isa 26).

5.3   The Myuma Group

At the conclusion of our IMYRP project, a new Indigenous corporation, the Myuma Group, was commencing engagement in the Mt Isa housing environment through its innovative collaborative partnership with QHPW. The Myuma Group is comprised of three interlinked Aboriginal corporations centred on the upper Georgina River in far western Queensland, which were established by the local traditional owners, the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people. In 2001, the Myuma Group established a principal work camp on the outskirts of Camooweal (a township near the Queensland-Northern Territory border), then a second work camp at a remote limestone quarry, and an office in Mt Isa. From these three bases, they have administered a combination of enterprises, training, service delivery and cultural heritage activities (Memmott 2012, p.244).

The constitutional objectives of the Myuma Group are to promote and benefit the welfare of the Aboriginal communities of the upper Georgina River region, but in the last eight years it has expanded geographically to assist people throughout the greater part of the north-east Australia. Myuma Proprietary Limited runs an enterprise operation (including labour and plant hire) and also employs and delivers accredited training programs to local Aboriginal people in civil and mining construction and related support services (horticulture, hospitality and catering) (Memmott 2012, pp.246, 247). As mentioned previously, one of the Myuma corporations, the Rainbow Gateway Limited became the corporate vehicle for the Remote Jobs Community Program (RJCP) in NWQ, and it has most recently commenced providing an R&M service for DHPW stock in Mt Isa, with an intention to extend into the rural towns of NWQ (to be described later in Section 6.3).

5.4   Organisational constraints

5.4.1   Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre

In the short and medium terms, success focuses on the practical aspects of shelter and reduced risks in terms of drinking behaviour and therefore general safety. For many however, this could be achieved by facilitated return to their home communities. In the medium term and long term, clients' take-up of training opportunities is significant for setting themselves on a path to successful housing (with a prioritised position on the public rental waiting list), a path that at times is made more difficult due to the short supply of housing exacerbated by the 'two-speed' mining economy (Memmott et al. 2013, p.41). Jimaylya aims for minimum client stays in its centre in an effort to move people into housing, but unfortunately there is a 'bottleneck' because of lack of available rental housing. Waiting lists have been operating for a decade or more. Where some clients should be staying for short (two weeks maximum), some stay for medium periods (c. 3–6 months) but many are staying longer (Memmott & Nash 2012, p.20).

Figure 7: Typical movement of Indigenous people through Mt Isa housing and institutionalised residences, including pathways in and out of the Jimaylya Centre
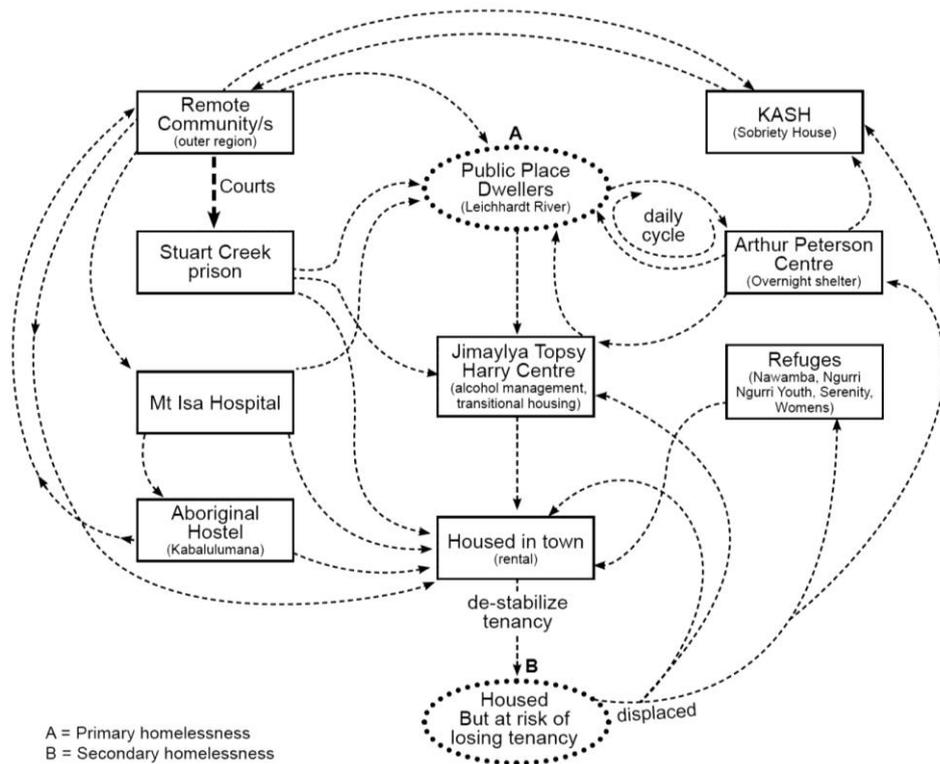
Source: Memmott and Nash 2012, p.20

Notwithstanding this degree of success, a number of clients were 'recycling' through the Centre and other facilities (as illustrated in Figure 7 above), suggesting that for some clients, progression through the Jimaylya Centre to tenancies was not readily achievable. More research is needed to fully understand and analyse the 'recycling' phenomenon for Indigenous homeless in the region and its relationship to the availability of rental housing (Memmott et al. 2013, p.41).

5.5 Agency of frontline workers

Question 15 asked 'What is the Indigenous housing organisation trying to get to happen/achieve?' However, due to the inactivity of Indigenous Housing Organisation's in Mt Isa, most could not reply to this question. Only three housing staff responded and no meaningful responses were received from tenants.

Isa 3 said that Indigenous Organisations 'have the same goal [as DHPW], but they go about it in a different way', implying they were lenient with their tenants and did not reinforce the keeping of rules. This Officer was presumably referring to the few successfully remaining ICHOs in the region such as Jimberella Co-op in Dajarra and Bynoe Co-op in Normanton; or alternatively, to the remote community councils in Gununa and Doomadgee. These councils were reported to be pro-active in their housing agency:

> At Doomadgee, the [Aboriginal] council seem to perceive they make fairer decisions [than DHPW] although many community members would disagree with this. Council see the improvement to the community—the Mayor says it is a good deal [re the NPARIH refurbishment program]. (Isa 13)

The agency of the Jimaylya staff involves techniques to achieve outreach to homeless clients (such as free bar-b-ques) together with other co-ordinated agencies, as well as the post-Jimaylya services of visiting and counselling clients once they have been placed in their DPHW tenancies. When clients are residing at Jimaylya, the management style is a culturally appropriate, 'tough love' style whereby clients are warned for misdemeanours and eventually asked to leave if they do not conform to the standing rules, but they are inevitably let back in if they re-present and are given another chance (Memmott & Nash 2012).

5.6 Towards tenant and government

The capacity of the Jimaylya Centre to influence its clients through behavioural change to their lifestyles and the gaining of knowledge on housing conditionality are important positive services in the Mt Isa housing sector. Again this was evident in interviewee responses.

> We've been in Mt Isa about three years. The rules are getting tighter. They won't just let anyone get a house. We used to camp in the river at Dinner Camp and Big Reach and opposite Topsy Harry camp. Very hard—police came at night. But not dangerous. Police spill out your grog. [From there], we used to be at Jimaylya. Now we can drink in our house here, but we drink quietly, no noise; but we don't even drink anymore—this a nice flat. (Isa 11)

> Got three strikes rule now. Getting tighter [but] we not had a strike; we know what it's about. We had a meeting about it at Jimaylya. (Isa 14)

Similarly, the pro-active entry of the successful Myuma Group through its Rainbow Gateway Limited is another positive step occurring in Mt Isa. It has the potential to forge a new partnership between a well-resourced Indigenous Organisation and the DHPW and TAFE, and perhaps a new chapter in Aboriginal housing management after the demise of many of the old Housing Co-ops that were established in the last century. The following Figure 8 summarises the Myuma perspective.

Figure 8: A diagram produced with input from Myuma's General Manager indicating the dual perspective of Myuma on the Aboriginal tenants of Mt Isa and on the government sector, in its efforts to connect people with jobs through the service sector

Looking for Partnerships:
Myuma administrating Remote Jobs Community Program (RJCP) on behalf of small welfare-dependent communities. How to get economic traction in a wealthy mining region albeit with fluctuating economy?
Myuma is currently faced with developing R&M contract teams for public housing out of RJCP, pre voc training, TAFE apprenticeships. Partnerships essential between Myuma & Qld Housing & TAFE & V Tech. But also Mining Cos.

History:
- Massacre
- Native Police
- Diseases
- Decimation
- Slave labour
- The Acts
- Stolen Wages
- Stolen children
- Welfare dependency

Popn's 100 to 400
Legend
442(415) =
442 people in total collection area, of whom 415 are ATSI.

GULF COMMUNITIES TO NORTH

Economic Driver 1
$$$$$$
INTERNATIONAL MINERAL PRICES

border

NORTHWEST MINERAL PROVINCE

WEALTH

Camooweal 187 (105) ● ■ Myuma

● Wunara Outstation

Develop R&M Teams for Housing through apprentices. TAFE. RJCP.

CIRCULAR MOBILITY & MIGRATION INTO ISA

Mt Isa 20,570 (3070)
TAFE
HSG OFFICE
POTENTIAL JOBS +
HOME OWNERSHIP
TWO SPEED ECONOMY

● Cloncurry 2796 (551) ● Julia Creek 634 (21)

Alpurrurulam ● 442 (415) ● Urandangi

WEST MT ISA RJCP
HIGH POVERTY
WELFARE DEPENDENCY
SMALL COMMUNITIES

Dajarra ● 429 (156)

Boulia 230 (122) ●

Economic Driver 2
$$$$$$
FEDERAL / STATE INFRASTRUCTURE CONTRACTS

N.T. | QLD

5.7 Summary

The number and capacity of Indigenous organisations in Mt Isa has become limited and there was no dedicated ICHOs operating effectively at the time of our study.

The Jimaylya Centre presents a special case due to its internal Indigenous management and staffing that persuades us to deal with it as an ICHO. Jimaylya provides homeless people with safe shelter, a managed drinking program, training in positive tenancy behaviour and then accommodation leading to housing, as well as the building of social capital and resilience. Organisational constraints for Jimaylya include the lack of available rental housing for clients ready to transit out and a proportion of clients who 'fall through the cracks', 'recycling' through homelessness again and back into the Centre. The agency of the Jimaylya staff involves implementing techniques to achieve outreach to homeless clients, as well as the post-Jimaylya services of visiting and counselling clients. The capacity of the Jimaylya Centre to influence its clients through behavioural change to their lifestyles and the gaining of knowledge on housing conditionality are important positive services in the Mt Isa housing sector.

At the conclusion of our IMYRP project, a new Indigenous corporation, the Myuma Group (through its Rainbow Gateway Limited), was commencing engagement in the Mt Isa housing environment through its innovative collaborative partnership with QHPW. It has most recently commenced providing an R&M service for DHPW stock in Mt Isa, with an intention to extend into the rural towns of NWQ. This recent pro-active engagement by the Myuma Group, forging a new partnership with DHPW and

TAFE, perhaps brings a new chapter in Aboriginal housing management after the demise of many of the old Housing Co-ops that were established in the last century.

6   RECOGNITION SPACE

6.1   Introduction

The preceding sections on tenant, government and Indigenous organisational perceptions have provided the basis for discussion of the recognition space in Mt Isa. Unlike other case studies, the Indigenous organisations did not have a dominant role (putting Jimaylya aside as 'quasi-government'). There was a degree of diversity to views on some topics between government (Housing Department) and tenants. The views of individual tenants reflected the typical circumstances in which they were accommodating large households, often under stress of substance abuse and family violence, as well as the legal constraint of their tenancy agreement. From another perspective, the DHPW employees aimed to manage rental housing in line with current policies, in the knowledge that there is insufficient housing stock for the number of residents. On the other hand, Indigenous and community organisations (Jimaylya, Myuma) were focussed on providing a range of services, including transitional housing, in a complex and changing political field. As set out below, these different and often conflicting perspectives framed the recognition space, which sometimes appeared to be corroding though at other times demonstrated more positive sustainable features.

One indicator of the disparity in the recognition space was the differences and diversities in the perceptions of what the rules were purposely intending to achieve; this was the case in both interview cohorts, the tenants and the Housing Officers.

One Housing Officer (Isa 5) gave a dual perspective: 'There are two perspectives. Government needs to pay off the mortgage [and] the tenant paying their own way; realising the house doesn't come for free' (Isa 5). This was elaborated by Isa 4:

> Nothing's free in this world. It's setting up the tenant for transition to private rental or home ownership, they're aware of the process. It's about collecting money as well—but we don't break even on R&M. If you pay for it, you appreciate it. Need to pay your way in society—rental housing is a hand up. Our waiting lists are getting bigger—there are more people in high need. Once people thought of getting a house and staying forever. In the past, people were there for life, 20 to 30 years. Now: 'Not a hand out, but a hand up', and leads to private rental or home ownership. (Isa 4)

These comments clearly articulate the shift from the 20th century role of social housing occupiable for life, to the new neo-liberal agenda of pressuring citizens to move into economic participation and home ownership.

Table 3: Competing objectives in the Mt Isa recognition space

State perspectives of desired outcomes	Individual tenant perspectives on desired outcomes	Intermediary organisations perspectives on desired outcomes
A diverse set of stated outcomes included attributes of tenant pride, happiness, sustainability and overcoming need.	For some, especially those who came through the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre, the first need of their self-agency was to reform their own lifestyles to achieve their well-being goals.	It must be noted that no dedicated Indigenous housing management organisation was operating effectively in Mt Isa. But two other good practice agencies were explored:
Also a composite set of outcomes to generate a holistic sense of well-being or quality of life, including (a) the broader aspect of establishing and promoting social norms and values, especially pride of ownership of a house, and (b) respecting one's neighbours where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were co-residing in the Mt Isa suburbs.	A substantial number of tenants perceived housing to be essential to achieve their lifeworld goals around the well-being of their children.	Jimaylya provides homeless people with safe shelter, a managed drinking program, training in positive tenancy behaviour, knowledge on housing conditionality and then accommodation leading to housing, as well as the building of social capital and resilience.
Comply to a norm of social values around the image and behaviour of households and houses in particular neighbourhoods. Safety and security are tenants' goals.	A number also emphasised the role of housing in conjunction with their ability to achieve a sense of independence, stability and/or peace for their households.	The Myuma Group aims to connect stable tenancy and good quality homes to Aboriginal training, employment and tenancy (currently via R&M contracts). An ultimate outcome is employed Aboriginal adults as home owners (option to buy rental housing).
Maintaining morale and motivation of QDHPW staff.	The Aboriginal custom of taking in visitors was viewed as a necessary and unavoidable event, inherent to their culture.	
Strategies to keep rental arrears down to target levels.		

The DHPW officers in Mt Isa have a recognised track record of creating a 'recognition space' for their tenants as reported in previous studies (Flateau et al. 2009, Milligan et al. 2010).

In seeking objective understandings of what constitutes a successful 'recognition space' the following questions need to be considered:

→ Recall a situation where tenants, community leaders, and government workers reached a shared understanding and worked well together in running the rules. What was working with it?

→ What were the starting conditions for this to occur?

→ How can such a recognition space be maintained (given changes in policies and personnel)?

→ What community strengths (current or proposed) or programs can help people to follow the rules?

6.2   Corroding and dissolving

This section contains a discussion about forces that have been identified as corroding and dissolving the 'recognition space' between tenants, Housing Officers and Indigenous agencies. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 have outlined constraints experienced by

tenants, Housing Officers and, to a lesser extent, Indigenous agencies. Embedded in these constraints are many aspects that represent forces which corrode and dissolve the potential recognition space. Let us elicit some of these aspects.

Although tenants saw their kin relationships as a form of positive social capital which they were morally obliged and motivated to maintain, they simultaneously acknowledged that when their visitors indulged in alcohol consumption, their behaviour could become anti-social, disturbing neighbours, attracting complaints and thereby destabilising the household's tenancy stability. These issues become most frequently exacerbated in the suburb of Pioneer with its high density of Aboriginal households (in itself a corroding force) who became the victims of their own hospitality, rendering their social capital as a 'double-edge sword'.

Most tenants' own capacities were limited by their poverty, which is in turn exacerbated by excessive alcohol consumption (as discussed above). Other constraints and clashes around culturally distinct lifestyles and tenancy conditionality stemmed from keeping yard animals, externally oriented living, the informal practice of perceived family ownership and succession of particular houses, and tenant attitudes that they had a right to Aboriginal ways of living. Tenants' residential mobility within the wider region motivated by their kinship social capital also provided discontinuities in tenancy relationship development for Housing Officers providing the latter with a constant set of administrative issues around conditionality.

The recurrent undermining of tenancy stability in these ways led to relationships with DHPW that were often adversarial, despite the efforts of Housing Officers to proactively communicate and create 'safety nets' to protect tenants against these problems. Such adversarial circumstances in turn corrode the potential of the negotiation space.

While kinship was (and is) a strong social 'glue' driving many behaviour patterns, traditional systems of governance and leadership had been gradually weakening and disappearing in Mt Isa, having not been resilient or adaptive to the difficult forces of colonial and post-colonial occupation in the region. There were no strong active independent Aboriginal advocates for tenants in Mt Isa, which limited tenants' empowerment and capacity to participate in collective negotiations with DHPW.

In addition to the above aspects, drawn from the earlier part of the report, the following attributes of the Mt Isa tenancy environment were also identified as corroding and dissolving the potential of the recognition space. As for the above, many of these elicited factors are the result of lost opportunity for effective communication, resulting in perceived imbalances in responsibilities and reciprocities between Housing Officers and tenants.

6.2.1 Lack of timely R&M response undermining relations

QHPW Housing Officers emphasised the need for enforcing the rules to reduce damage and over-use by an excess of occupants. Nevertheless, attention to repairs and maintenance was notoriously slow. Furthermore, Aboriginal tenants in Mt Isa are severely disadvantaged. Additional social and other physiological 'costs' (e.g. stress, feeling of marginalisation) are incurred by tenants when they have to live in unattractive and at times unsafe environments as well as being frustrated by a tenancy management process in which they feel unacknowledged by housing authorities.

Thus, when seeking reports from tenants of positive things happening in the negotiation space, the interviewees often had difficulty and instead emotionally

reverted to presenting the frustration of getting R&M done as a force undermining any positive events.

> A woman [Housing Officer] said maintenance needed on our yard, [but] I said 'f**k the yard'—you gotta do maintenance on the house. (Isa 23)

> More serious problem is time factor with R&M. Always takes too long. Contractors are probably flat out. Can't get to a place within a time frame. Should put job out to a private contractor to get it done in a proper time frame, ASAP. Tenants would then be more cooperative—and have a better relationship. (Isa 26)

> Never had house painted in 10 years. I ask them a while ago to get things done. When you ask they say 'We haven't got the money for that'. Floor coverings, fences, shed—never got one. Maintenance—house is old and broken down but I try to keep it clean. Holes being fixed—painters coming. I've been told that two years ago! (Isa 16)

Whereas several interviewees remained fixated with the problems of getting R&M done effectively (Isa 9, 16), only one concluded some positive outcomes at times:

> Sometimes it take a while to come but mostly things work. When you live in a house and pay rent, then you get on to them to fix it up. Sometimes good response, sometimes bad. The other day … the toilet was broken. They said they couldn't fix until funding comes through in July. (Isa 10)

This issue takes on a different perspective when senior Housing managers differentiate their priorities to fix up houses for health and safety reasons ahead of normal cyclic maintenance. Items falling under health and safety are often the result of 'wilful damage' that is often in turn the result of alcohol violence, as noted elsewhere. DHPW spent $2.5 million on wilful damage in Pioneer in 2012 (B.S. 3 June 2013). This results in a severe depletion of funds available for cyclic R&M. It also helps explain the polarisation of perceptions on this issue. Nevertheless, tenants often blamed the Housing Officers for these failures even though they were out of their control, thus corroding relationships further.

6.2.2   Ineffective styles of communication by Housing Officers at times

A number of Aboriginal interviewees (Isa 14, 15, 23, 29, 19, 25) highlighted the importance of the style of verbal communication between Housing Officers and tenants, commenting on aspects such as the need for appropriate plain English, a more caring approach, respect, being a practised listener and refraining from a condescending style. Thus Isa 14 said 'too much big words, [and] papers too much big rules; we can only read and write a little', and Isa 23 said 'they talk down, like they're the boss, instead of meeting the need and listening to the need'. A number of interviewees commented on the excuse of insufficient funds as a way of avoiding a face-to-face negotiated process.

> Don't treat you like you're a dumb black. They talk down to you a bit. Need a better rapport. I have to explain to Cynthia [wife] later. They come here and seem to want to get out quick. They should listen when people come to them in their office. Show them that it's important to them to listen, know how I feel. It seems like they don't care—just give excuses like 'No money'. (Isa 16)

> They could come and meet with us and see when we need extra assistance. There's no-one to sit and make you comfortable. There's no-one that seems to care about your situation. It's all about money! (Isa 15)

Just sit down and yarn and talk—that's the best way. Can all ask what they want … but they always say 'No funding'. (Isa 25)

6.2.3 Cynical tenant attitudes on the potential of working well together

A proportion of interviewees (Isa 7, 11, 14, 16, 21, 22, 28, 29) could not think of any examples of working well together with DHPW, with one (Isa 16) asserting that it has 'never happened like that,' and one who said 'can't imagine a good working relationship' (Isa 28); whilst another said 'It's trying to whip a dead horse in some circumstances; run into obstacles' (Isa 26). One interviewee said examples of shared understandings were limited, stating 'Not a lot of success stories unfortunately; some tenants have worked with many agencies, but their cases never worked out well' (Isa 5). One cited an ironic experience of a minor goodwill gesture from a Housing Officer combined with a warning:

> They brought cops with them to give me a calendar and told me I can't bring my relative here at rodeo time; two police cars came here, and the housing lady was growling me. (Isa 22)

This calendar was in fact an initiative implemented state-wide by the QDHPW to assist tenants with their responsibilities set out for them on a temporal framework: 'A calendar has been approved for communities and a pamphlet' (Isa 2), with 'month-by-month obligations shown on the calendar and explained to the tenants (Isa 1).

6.2.4 Under representation of Aboriginal staff in DHPW Office

All QHPW staff complete an Indigenous-run cultural awareness course, but this does not fully or probably even substantially redress the tenant communication challenges. The fact that there has not been an Elders' group in Mt Isa for many years also suggests a gap in leadership and undeveloped channels of communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. Various tenants interviewed spoke of the lack of 'black faces' and the lack of respect that they felt from the non-Indigenous officers at times.

> At Queensland Housing Office … We need some young Aboriginal face on the counter. Need more employment for our people. People feel relaxed when talking to their own people. (Isa 20)

> When Housing talk they bring out big words. Bush people [e.g. from Lake Nash] can't talk English and need an interpreter. Need a black face—an Indigenous officer/case-worker. 'We'd be all right then. They'd understand us'. (Isa 19)

Understanding the perspective of the Housing Officers is important here. Senior managers (B.S., A.W. 02 August 2013) explained:

> The compliance role has been found to be too stressful for many Aboriginal staff generally. Equity of salary and role cannot occur if they can't fulfil the role. Compliance is the dominant role of housing staff—instructing people to comply to their tenancy agreement. New [Aboriginal IEOs] ones can't cope with this and don't last.

There was a proposition that 'reverse racism' was at times occurring—blacks attacking whites for doing their service, yet the Housing Officers believe they do a professional job. The historic role of government white workers has conditioned locals to accept white bureaucratic power in many ways. (But as pointed out earlier there is a local Aboriginal Housing Officer employed at Doomadgee, and another was employed at the Mt Isa office towards the end of our research.) Equity surrounding cultural leave is another sensitive issue amongst white staff, catalysed when an

Aboriginal staff member might appear to take excessive leave for 'sorry business' and funerals (B.S., A.W. 2 August 2013). There are thus two perspectives to consider in this issue.

6.2.5 The constant change of political cycles

One important factor that cyclically corrodes and impedes opportunities to work in the Recognition Space, is change in government, policy, funding and programs. Since 2011 in Mt Isa the authors observed two changes of local government, two changes in state government (Labor Party to Liberal National Party and back to Labor) and one change in the Australian Government (Labor to Liberal). Such changes inevitably lead to policy changes rippling down into local program changes, budget shifts and at times, overall communication challenges, some discontinuity of rules and inconsistency in relationships with and service provision to clients. This was reflected in some Housing Officers' comments in response to directives coming down from Head Office in Brisbane. For example,

> When every change of government happens, the policies and services change. We decentralise or centralise depending on which government is in power. [But] decentralisation is the way to go! Can't build rapport, no empathy, if you haven't lived in the area and know the issues. (Isa 3)

This represents an appeal for flexibility to enable adaption of transforming imposed conditionalities in resolving local tenancy problems in accordance with regional socio-economic parameters. The same Housing Officer noted the need to regularly review the policy disparities between the state head office and local levels:

> Continuing things that work but also looking at things that don't work and working it out. There is a gap between workers on the ground and policy-makers in Brisbane who often have lost touch with what happens on the ground and so how can you make policies that fit to sustain and support department [front line workers]. Alternatively, the workers don't have the 'Big Picture' view and so can't see why policy decisions were made and how that impacts at a higher level. (Isa 3)

It is to be noted that at the time of completing this report the new Labor Government Minister for Housing was announcing the likely dismantling of the 'three strikes' rule.

6.2.6 Deep historical disparity

The history of white-on-black conflict and socio-economic suppression in the region sometimes manifested in interviews through the continuing feelings of hurt and mistrust in the Indigenous community. As Aboriginal people living in remote region of Australia, the participants have been subject to the effects of colonisation and racism that have existed in various forms. Tenant perceptions of how officers of the DHPW related to them is marked by this history and also by ongoing Indigenous disadvantage, often resulting in considerable uncertainty and stress over tenancies. The winning of Native Title has not been highly significant for shifting the balance of authority in favour of local Aboriginal groups in Mt Isa, and the day-to-day lived reality for Indigenous people suggests that there is a long way to go to 'close the gap' in areas such as educational attainment, health, employment and, most relevantly, housing.

6.2.7 The Doomadgee governance complexity

A governance complexity was noted by Isa 13 at Doomadgee, between the tenant, the council and the Housing Department leading to high arrears there. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), the

government agreement for remote communities was to transfer the lessor from council to the state for a 40-year lease and there are some continuing tensions as council attempt to assert their role.

> When this happens the tenant has to sign a new tenancy agreement. The state pays the council for the leases. There are two contracts here. The Doomadgee Council ones are in place which means the state is paying council the lease fee. But the tenant contract has not been signed in all cases, so the tenant is not paying any rent to the state. (Isa 13)

> [There's a] fair bit of involvement by council at Doomadgee. Our tenancy allocation is often over-ridden by council. Sometimes the tenancy is nominated by the Mayor. Under agency appointment breaches [i.e. rental arrears] we have had refusals on our recommendation. We have to refer to council and they decide whether to go ahead and pursue the matter. This is usually for rental arrears, saying the amount to pay and the number of days to pay using a 'Notice of Remedy Breach'. Refusal by the council happens because they don't want action taken against a community person often because of their circumstances (maybe the person lost their job). This is likely to result in an increase in their arrears. Currently it is at 23 per cent overall. In some situations, it is a case of incomplete payments—they change their Centrelink payment arrangement that they have previously agreed to. But since 2010, only one Court arrangement has been needed to effect repayments. The tenants are paying rent to Housing, but Housing has to remit the rent to council. About 26 tenants are outstanding at Doomadgee. The department has to also bear the cost for R&M. The department is paying the lease as well; it's taking time/slowly to sort it out. (Isa 13)

> We have a QCAP lodgement for Doomadgee at present—a tenant refused to sign a 40-year lease. The tenant says council has no right to sign an agreement giving houses away to the state; it is really a matter of anti-state sentiment. This is the first in the state to go to court over this stance. (Isa 13)

6.3 Formative and sustaining

In this section, we describe initiatives that have been implemented and established in the Mt Isa tenancy environment that constituted a recognisable achievement in fostering or creating a recognition space, hence the term 'formative and sustaining' initiatives. 'Establishment' of such is either by contract, memorandum of agreement or long-standing recurring professional practice. This goes beyond the identification of useful values, emerging prospects, intermittent strengths or mere pilot initiatives that will be considered further in the next section under 'Enablers'.

Question 17 asked staff 'Can you describe situations where tenants, leaders, housing organisations and governments reached a shared understanding and were working well together in running the rules?' Most of the six staff had a positive response to this question and were able to elicit one or two good practice examples. Only six of the 24 tenants interviewed could cite a good practice example. Question 18 asked 'If you can get that [situation], how can it be maintained (given the likely changes in policies and politics)?'

6.3.1 Inter-agency meetings, Integrated Case Management (ICM) and tenants' meetings

Although not involving the active participation of tenants, a clearly formative and sustaining process in Mt Isa was the occurrence of ICM meetings. These brought the Housing Officers together with staff from other government departments and NGOs,

including the Jimaylya Centre. Many of these other agencies had Aboriginal staff who provided a voice and some advocacy for tenants.

> ICM monthly meetings bring together all the relevant agencies in town [to deal with individual cases]. With the consent of the tenant, we bring up their issues such as homelessness, addiction, property damage, child safety. It deals with people evicted for bad behaviours. Housing Department, Riverbed Action Group, Topsy Harry [Jimaylya], ATODS, Queensland Health, NWQICSS, Child Safety, Police, Centacare … all attend. (Isa 2)

However, the relative effectiveness and success of ICM was said to have been variable depending on the capacities of the individual members, which waxed and waned for a variety of reasons.

> ICM going for five years. Some great outcomes. But can weaken when a change of staff. Some agencies stop coming. Then have to re-vamp it such as a change of venue, new minute takers, re-fresh the approach, go back to why we are doing it; each agency to give a five-minute talk on their capacity/program. (Isa 2)

Some limitations were mentioned about running such an initiative for small rural towns. For example, 'there is an inter-agency meeting in Normanton but we can't attend due to lack of accommodation for visiting public servants … We are limited by not being there' (Isa 4). However, tenants' meetings were generally identified as good practice in certain rural towns of the region.

> The regular presence by Housing, for example at Normanton helps tenants' perceptions and behaviours. They know we'll always be coming back. Police know this too and are willing to work with us. Community organisations will phone, and tee-up meetings to discuss things with other stakeholders. (Isa 3)

> In Normanton, people are looking forwards towards meeting. Our monthly visits are critical to success. With particular agency combinations for particular tenants with particular problems. Normanton has lots of community organisations; same in Camooweal—they [housing office staff] regularly visit there too. Just getting involved in a series of town inter-agency meetings for Georgina basin town communities including RFDS. (Isa 4)

The idea of a set of housing teams each looking after all of the tenancy issues in one place (a small town or suburb) was seen as an asset compared to the modus operandi of some other government departments in Mt Isa. Thus, 'Mt Isa Housing look after ALL aspects of tenancies [whereas] other departments have officers who have specialised jobs rather than by place' (Isa 3).

Despite the positive achievements and continuation of these meetings, one Housing Officer complained of the severe fund-cutting campaign imposed by the previous Government in Queensland and its impact on their capacity to facilitate tenants' meetings in small rural towns of the region.

> DATSIMA [Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs] might be able to get funds for a meeting hall and disposable cups/plates etc. but we can't. Definitely should keep or restart tenant meetings. But no base in small towns; no shady place to meet, computer access and where people can come and see us. Nowhere to go in Camooweal, it's so hot etc. where to meet clients? (Isa 4)

6.3.2 Creating a recognition space with an Aboriginal council at Mornington Island

Although there were no dedicated ICHOs in Mt Isa representing the interests of the city's Aboriginal tenants, there were in some other towns in NWQ. One was Gununa (Mornington Island) where Housing Officers have demonstrated their capacity to work effectively in the classical recognition triangle (government/ICHO/tenant) due to the presence of a functioning Aboriginal council. One senior Housing Officer reported as such:

> At Mornington Island, yes; for example, around absences from residences. We get the [Aboriginal] council's advice on how to handle such issues. We draft a 'fact sheet' and present it to the council for feedback. In the case of rental arrears KPIs, comparisons are made to other parts of the state. Pride then results from reducing the rent arrears percentage [below the levels recorded in other Queensland towns]. The council says if they [the tenants] don't pay rent, they have to get out of the house. Originally we did have barriers; but we had to work hard to turn things around. (Isa 13)

Conforming to conditionalities was in general at Mornington Island 'working very well to this point, and council are happy for us to continue without any of their direct involvement, but we give them regular project updates' (Isa 13). DHPW staff also reported having successful meetings at Doomadgee: 'Housing Officers meet with council every fortnight, and have regular interaction with the Mayor in his office' (Isa 13). The above demonstrates the capacity of the Housing Officers to 'open' the negotiation space, given a stable Indigenous agency with which to partner.

6.3.3 Jimaylya as a focus for tenancy support

With its Indigenous staff and leadership who deal with homeless people, the program of the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre provides a critically important role in opening up and generating the recognition space. As Aboriginal individuals and couples pass through this Centre, moving from a homeless poverty-stricken, and often rough-sleeping, binge-drinking lifestyle in the Leichhardt River, to potentially and ultimately a stable tenancy in rental housing, they undergo educational training in 'home making'. This involves classes on the tenancy rules as well as well as a range of cooking, cleaning, budgeting and yard maintenance skills. Once occupying their new house or flat in Mt Isa, support is maintained by Jimaylya's Counsellor who visits them regularly. Some of these tenants regularly visit Jimaylya for social drinking and one incident occurred of a tenant couple returning to Jimaylya for respite when they were overwhelmed by visitors who brought anti-social behaviour. Elsewhere we have written about the importance of how this Centre operates in an Aboriginal way, staffed by Aboriginal people and managers working in an inter-cultural manner by bridging between Aboriginal values and Anglo-Australian housing norms (Memmott & Nash 2012). This experience was clearly embedded in the responses of interviewees who had passed through this Centre, and for whom a form of recognition space had thereby been created. Thus one tenant said:

> Two ladies from Housing [Office] came to Jimaylya and explained the rules— we write it all down [the tenancy rules]. So got it there, what happens when you move in. One of the ladies came with us when we moved into our house. She found things wrong and wrote it all down. I didn't know about this [practice]. In Tennant Creek it's terrible [by comparison]. This is good here. They come once a month and talk. None of us had any idea about that. Explain things in simple terms to people they understand. A big problem is

how to budget and that. Marion [ego's sister] stays one step in lead; pays rent
and bills in advance. (Isa 6)

Although the Jimaylya Centre is a wholly state government program, the Aboriginal
managers are, due to their positive track record, given a fairly high degree of
autonomy in the day-to-day running of the Centre, so much so it can be regarded as a
type of de facto Aboriginal agency. Indeed, it has come to fill the role of absentee
Aboriginal agencies that once did exist and still should exist in Mt Isa, but
unfortunately do not appear imminent.

6.3.4 A work practice of flexibility in the DHPW Area Office

The Mt Isa Housing Officers recognised that they worked in an Area Office where
successive Managers had developed and been able to maintain a degree of flexibility
in applying policy, despite a perceived rigidity or strictness of policy in the way things
ought to be done, that appeared to come down from Brisbane (the state capital) at
times.

> If a Manager came here who couldn't be flexible, it would impact on staff and
> community morale. We can get there [positive outcomes] in a roundabout way;
> and not so policy driven. (Isa 13)

The Mt Isa Housing Office, in being proactive about and within the recognition space,
has developed a special and unorthodox set of tenancy initiatives to attempt to
stabilise tenancies through their vulnerable times of high visitation by relatives from
the outer region. These times have been identified as being at Christmas, Show week
and Rodeo week.

One aspect is a flexible approach to the payment of rent. The Area Office encourages
advance rental payments that accrue as an informal bank to cover known future
periods of financial stress when visitors predictably will arrive. There is capacity for
tenants to sign up for extra rent to be deducted on every pay so they are always in
advance (Isa 1). This fund can be drawn upon to pay for home damage incurred by
visitors or simply withdrawn to pay for other excessive home bills at the time or any
future time. One tenant expressed gratitude for the availability of the practice of
paying rent in advance: 'But paying in advance; I'll leave money [in credit] for a rainy
day—I put $10 a week for R&M' (Isa 23).

Housing Officers make pre-rodeo, pre-Show and pre-Christmas visits to see known
vulnerable tenants and to maintain this strategy. Another related service provided by
Housing Officers is to encourage tenants to seek help from them in encouraging their
visitors to leave when they have outworn their welcome, but are unable to do so
themselves due to the need to be seen to be respecting their kin.

> Housing help tenants to advise visitors about when they've stayed too long.
> Tenants have to be responsible about visitors and about advising Housing [so
> that they can get assistance]. If family come and stay for two weeks that's ok;
> but if they stay for longer then you could ask Housing to speak to visitors.
> Housing say that more than one month and you need to get police to move
> them. Made me feel no good—I can't do that to family. Visitors have their set
> of rules when they come from bush communities—sometimes there's a clash
> of rules with my rules [e.g.] family [from NT] let children stay up till later than
> my kids—bed times are hard. (Isa 15)

Other proactive services demonstrating a willingness to be flexible and recognising
tenants' changing needs were recorded. For example, in a new block of flats, a senior
Housing Officer developed, under the R&M budget, six colour scheme variations
whereby the new tenants got a choice of colours—although those who moved in last

got less colour options to choose from as the colours were progressively used up (B.S. 25 May 13). According to the staff, the intention here was to allow tenants to personalise the appearance of their house and to give an impression of it being privately owned (A.W. 31 July 2013). This is a significant gesture, but a negotiated process with tenant on colour schemes across numerous houses in a cyclic painting program may be more effective. Other examples pertain to recognising the need of a tenant to change the location of their house. One Housing Officer said:

> One good practice example comes to mind in Pioneer. There is a house opposite the store, where there are always congregating people and problems on the footpath. Seven children in the household. Saw the husband with a shopping trolley of bread—kids just keep coming! Child Safety asked us to move them, and it worked [stabilised the tenancy]. Now they keep the crowding under control. There were some complaints re the kids throwing rocks and stealing … but they were just visitor kids. He reprimanded them. (Isa 5)

One tenant who was a Kalkadoon Elder gave a positive example of a DHPW response that occurred when he was in extreme danger.

> Once when I was managing a boarding house, I had an argument with the KKK ['Klu Klux Klan'—violent local racist person]—they attacked me and the Department of Housing and government assisted me with emergency housing and then I moved here [a rented house] in 2000. (Isa 20)

An example of local DHPW flexibility was recorded in relation to one tenancy couple, Isa 11 and his spouse (former heavy drinkers and river dwellers), who had moved from Jimaylya into a flat and were preoccupied with the problem of housing their dog during the interview:

> One thing, I've got a dog—it's grown too big—can't run around here; no fence at front. Housing said I could have a pet but I didn't know he'd grow so big (he's age one now). He's a wolf hound. (Isa 11)

At the completion of this report, we received information that DHPW had moved this couple into a house with a fence and yard to accommodate the dog, and that the couple were very happy and stable as a result of this flexibility.

The same Kalkadoon Elder cited above gave the following example of flexibility addressing a Dajarra water crisis.

> Water in remote communities is not suitable for drinking such as Dajarra, Urandangi, Boulia. Need filtration plants in housing for good drinking water. A prime example happened in Dajarra when I was on the Phosphate Mine Board: the Mine, the Cloncurry Shire and Queensland Housing agreed to cart water to Dajarra free of charge to provide good clean drinking water for the community and school. (Isa 20)

An overall strength underlying this practice of flexibility within the housing management services is that of the strong leadership and team cohesion in the Mt Isa Area Office.

6.3.5 Myuma and DHPW/TAFE/BAS collaborative initiatives

The absence of strong Aboriginal leaders and agencies in the Mt Isa service environment is juxtaposed by the strong regional track record of the Myuma Group in Camooweal. Significantly, towards the end of the interview period (mid 2014), an innovative economic venture was implemented between the Housing Office, the local TAFE, Queensland Building and Asset Services (BAS), and the Myuma Group. This

initiative involved the training of a selection of young Aboriginal adults from the towns of the region to carry out housing R&M, with a view to the gradual transfer of all housing R&M in the region being transferred to this corporation (Rainbow Gateway Limited trading within the Myuma Group), and relinquished from tender contractors who were more often than not based on the east coast. This scheme also involves the repair of a significant number of boarded-up vacant houses in Mt Isa; and possibly in the future, their being made available for rental and home ownership by Aboriginal trainees from Myuma who have become employed in Mt Isa with mining companies or other businesses. At the time of writing this report, a contractual relationship had also been struck between the Myuma Group and DHPW for teams of young adults from Doomadgee to be trained and to form work teams there to carry out a two-year R&M program on the housing stock (P.C., C.S. 28 July 2015).

This initiative is driven by the Myuma vision to address Aboriginal social problems by establishing enterprises and employment and to thereby enhance Aboriginal well-being in the region, in line with its constitution (see Figure 9 below). This vision has been shared by the Mt Isa Housing Service, TAFE and BAS.

Interestingly, the Aboriginal leader of the Myuma Group and the Manager of the Jimaylya Centre as well as being related, grew up working in the pastoral industry and experiencing Aboriginal pastoral worker lifestyles involving hard rules and structured stock camp routines. They both bring a management style of 'tough love' to their respective Aboriginal settings.

Figure 9: Challenges for the Myuma group in response to the Forrest Review (Forrest & Aust. DPMC, 2014) linking Aboriginal training and employment to housing
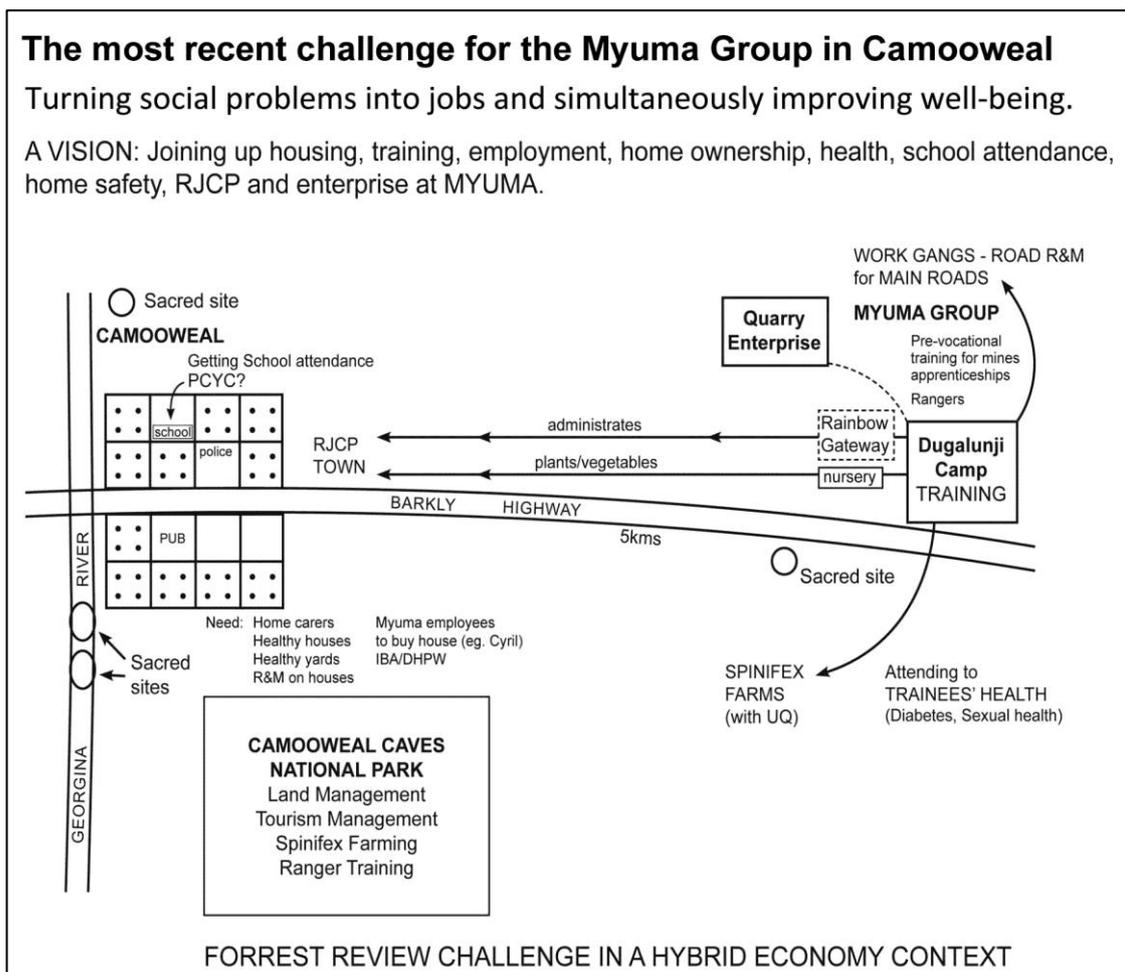
6.4　Enablers

The category of 'enablers' covers elements that could strengthen the processes of the recognition space and includes the identification of useful values, emerging prospects, intermittent strengths or pilot initiatives that could be considered further in the next section under 'Recommendations. A summary of the 'enablers' identified in the Mt Isa context follows.

6.4.1　Positive tenant attitudes about the need for a recognition space

Several tenant interviewees spoke clearly about the need for a recognition space thereby expressing a positive attitude to the enablement of such:

> Housing [staff] need to recognise that Aboriginal people have their own rules too. Housing rules are about not overcrowding and not drinking, [whereas] Aboriginal rules are about helping family; but if they're intoxicated then you tell them to go. (Isa 19)

One interviewee compared negotiation under Native Title law as a model for housing tenancy collaboration: 'Under Native Title Law, make an agreement, an ILUA [for example], for the survival of the community' (Isa 20).

> [We should] keep sit-down and talk until come to some point of agreement; and make to keep equal, meet up half way, then you'll be right, [but] if don't, lot of problem on your hands. (Isa 25)

Several tenant interviewees (Isa 18, 27, 30) expressed having a general capacity to collaborate in the negotiation space: 'Tenants can keep place clean, keep family numbers down and house/yard tidy, [and so] if they [Housing] work with us, we'll work with them' (Isa 18), and 'Keep going by the rules, and Housing [staff] have got their part' (Isa 30). In the above comments there is clearly a sense of having a culturally distinctive tenant view about tenancy that needs to be explored by Housing Officers within the recognition space.

6.4.2　The importance of respect in the recognition space

A number of tenants (Isa 8, 23) emphasised the traditional Aboriginal value of 'respect' as a necessary feature of the recognition space. On the one hand it was said that respect of tenants and their lifeways was 'what was missing' from the perspective of the Housing Officers (Isa 8), for example 'they [Housing] should give people in houses some respect; we give them respect' (Isa 19); but on the other hand tenants had to respect the organisational culture of the Housing Officers: 'It's their rules; they the ones who put rules into place, [so we need to] respect their ways' (Isa 23).

Within this perspective, a number of interviewees emphasised their traditional connections to country and their value of bush lifestyles in an effort to shape the alternative perspective on life values.

> My uncle is here [K.W.] and he comes from the bush [Areyene on the Sandover]. He talks about culture. We've got family living on country out there. (Isa 19)

> The [good] lifestyle that Aboriginal people have—camping out bush; but also we like to keep things clean [in our town house]. (Isa 29)

> From my grandfather—being out bush; he's a very respected person. That's my family; they have a lot of knowledge about living in the bush. One day I'll probably visit [out from Doomadgee] to go back and live in the bush… we have our own land with tin shed at [homeland]. (Isa 30)

6.4.3 The role of Elders and leaders

Question 19 asked 'What community strengths could help people to follow the rules?' Housing Officers generally answered this question by either (a) referring to the role of Elders as leaders, or (b) eliciting particular educational aids and courses for tenants (see further in 6.6 on this). Several Housing Officers (Isa 3, 5, 13) positively identified the important role of Elders who had and could support conditionality and housing aims, but indicated their role had waned in Mt Isa.

> Need strong leaders in the Aboriginal Community. There's always been respect around Elders. But now it's getting lost among younger people. Not so many Elders now. Might be non-existent in 20 years. Many years ago there was an Elders Group—run by Betty Kiernan [a past M.P.]. It would be worth reviving, to show the way for younger people with ASB issues. (Isa 5)

> Elders speak to the younger ones of the importance of paying rent—and build to credit [rent paid in advance]. Council show the community that they support us [Housing] and respect us—this is very important. This does happen. (Isa 13)

One officer emphasised the social capital of such a person: 'Elders are people who are perceived to be the leaders and are connected to most families' (Isa 3). One tenant respondent also described the attributes of a strong leader:

> Auntie [x] helps keep the peace around the place; she talks to people, both sides, and tries to work things out; she's a smooth talker and they listen to her, but she can turn around and become a dragon [when she has to, although] not like that all the time. (Isa 28)

Leadership also applies with respect to influencing younger tenants in their middle age to become what are sometimes called 'middle leaders' by Aboriginal people. Leadership at the householder scale was thus also mentioned by one tenant: 'Each person has to go to talk for themselves' (Isa 18).

6.4.4 Obtaining strength from within family structures (tenants)

A number of interviewees (Isa 15, 17, 18, 27, 28) made reference to the value of kinship and extended family relationships in providing residential support, a significant form of Aboriginal social capital.

> Family don't mind bundling up together. Some families don't care if they have 50 people in the house. I wouldn't put family out in the street! (Isa 17)

> We support—helping until they get on their feet for people who have been in trouble and in gaol. (Isa 28)

> … if someone comes to disturb the peace, my aunties will stand up for me. (Isa 18)

There are thus strong relationships between Indigenous community members that allow certain clients to mentor other at-risk householders (social capital strategies). There is also a set of Aboriginal socio-geographic structures within Aboriginal social capital of Mt Isa (the network of kin connections and country affiliations amongst Aboriginal housing tenants).

6.4.5 'Pride in Our Community' ('Pioneer') Day

Another enabling strategy for a recognition space was the 'Pride in Pioneer Day' (9 May 2013), involving a neighbourhood clean-up program with tenants seeing housing staff picking up rubbish and vice versa—generating positive perceptions and mutual

respect and bonding from joint labouring as a collaborative group. The Area Manager provided the following account of 'Pride in our Community Day'.

On 9 May 2013, we organised 'Pride in Our Community Day' aka 'Pride in Pioneer Day', involving a big clean up in Pioneer. It was done as part of 'Clean Up Australia Day' so everyone was covered by their insurance. JJ Richards Waste Disposal provided skips and free transport of all of the rubbish to the tip with 14 or 15 skips 220 cm, or over 12 tonne of rubbish (seven skips did two consecutive fill-ups). Every house had a full wheelie bin outside also.

The main organiser was the Housing Services City Team run by Alece. housing staff and Centacare staff and [G.F.], an Indigenous Councillor, all participated. Corrections' clients helped to collect the heavy stuff. We got the loan of cars from various agencies. A sausage bar-b-cue was organised by DATSIMA. We got some prizes donated as well: $1200 of vouchers and appliances and materials, vouchers for 10 pin bowling, shrubs, plants, fertilisers, meat orders, etc. Centacare and NWQICSS assisted.

We sent out a few letters beforehand—but mostly tenants were told by door knocking and word of mouth. A good turn-out happened. Then, tenants were helping tenants—the community spirit was evident. We tapped into a social capital. A powerful vibe of community action. Residents got a positive perception of housing staff. And bonding within the Housing agency occurred. (B.S. 24 May 2013)

Front line housing staff all conveyed this positive outcome of Pioneer Day.

Pride in Community Day was a really good day—relationships changed— tenant attitudes towards us changed. (Isa 1)

Pioneer Day; we did a big clean up. A great initiative, that brought together tenants, housing staff, Centrelink, the council etc. Bins, gloves, dump vouchers … everything was donated. (Isa 2)

Several housing staff (Isa 1, 2) spoke of the need for continuation of Pride in Community Day, but commented that obstacles had arisen in securing all of the agency partners to cooperate effectively, again implying there was not a convergence of views in the recognition space that had been opened during this short but innovative initiative.

6.4.6 Importance of Housing Officers visiting tenants

The importance of Housing Officers sitting down and talking through tenancy issues to try to find an equitable solution was preferred by various tenants to simply receiving written educational materials. A number requested more frequent visits by staff. 'Maybe Housing come and check up here more often; I don't know if it's just for Aboriginal people or not, but they're just slack' (Isa 6). However, a Housing Officer conceded 'There is a tendency to only visit bad tenants' (Isa 4). Nevertheless, there were other accounts of regular visits to needy tenants to assist them; for example, one Housing Officer said:

Yes, definitely [helping tenants], for example helping with cleaning property. [Johny Smith] was to get fined by the council. But we kept working with him re teaching him about cleaning products. We bought all the stuff and he did it. For example, we will ask visitors to go, on behalf of the tenant, if the tenant asks us to do that, because it's too hard for them. (Isa 5)

6.4.7 Enablement through tenant meetings with housing staff

Although tenant meetings had not been well attended in Mt Isa, a number of tenants (Isa 10, 18, 27, 28) advocated for 'community' and tenants' meetings to continue to discuss tenancy issues, and called for their increased frequency and publicity.

> Could have a meeting, talk to each other to help—talk in the park, about how we gotta run the houses, how family members can visit—so everyone can understand. (Isa 18)

> Should have Housing and tenants' meetings to set down rules such as about fighting, alcohol. (Isa 28)

> Should advertise community meetings on TV; everyone watches every day, on Channel 7 and 10 WIN. (Isa 7)

> It's so important for people concerned to meet and get to know [issues] … Meetings should be once a month. They leave it too long and things go back to square one! (Isa 8)

There was a general view that the occurrence of tenancy meetings in Pioneer organised by DHPW provided a positive outlet to voice their needs but unfortunately very few acted on this opportunity by attending: 'Have a Housing community meeting every month in Bronx, [but] I missed the meeting a couple of times' (Isa 23). The challenge remains of how to get better attendance at such meetings if tenants view them positively.

The 'Country Team' of Housing Officers spoke positively of the device of community meetings which they held in Normanton:

> In Normanton, we hold a monthly meeting, with cup of tea and eats. We use this forum to tell about new rules, get guest speakers. Would like to do that in other towns. But under the Newman Government meeting cost funds [were abolished] for hall hire and tea and coffee. No funds for this [so now] we cook ourselves and take food that we buy. (Isa 4)

Another Housing Officer advocated to 'allow discretion of policy to meet the community' and conceded that the Area Office do this now, unofficially (Isa 13).

6.4.8 Establishing a formal Aboriginal advocacy group

An alternative to regular meetings was the idea of having nominated Aboriginal leaders to represent all tenants in some sort of advocacy role.

> Get a group together who could speak up for you; for example, a Housing Issues Group; or a Suburb group has someone to represent them; another suburb has a rep. (Isa 7)

> On communities they have organisations; councils to look after family. All meet up together …. (Isa 18)

> All here [in Pioneer] should make rules stricter in Pioneer. (Isa 21)

> If a lot of us get together; get a committee going—then overcome anything. (Isa 25)

6.4.9 Multiple agencies helping

Several housing staff expressed the importance of obtaining coordinated help for needy tenants from other agencies.

Centacare help with housing applications and other requirements of Housing application—getting documents, like birth certificate; Also Centacare helps with furniture and can buy it on time-payment if you're a first timer. (Isa 22)

NWQICSS have a program on mower maintenance and there is an Aboriginal man at Pioneer with a service of mowing. (B.S. 25 May 2013)

We [Housing Officers] fought with council to get dump tokens for tenants. Other rate payers get them, so why not us? We got them now and give them out to ones [tenants] who need them: those doing dump runs themselves. About two people per week come in to ask for dump vouchers (costs $5 to $10 for a load otherwise). If they get the rubbish out of their yard, they can grow some grass. (Isa 1)

A strength in Normanton is that there are lots of organisations there. Improving and maintaining networking in communities. (Isa 4)

The need for addressing wider social problems was only mentioned by a few but was expressed potently: '[we] should be joining together to make sure that these children get help with drugs, alcohol etc. and teach others' (Isa 8). One tenant appealed for more help from agencies to deal with addressing the problems of youths whose ASB on the street impacts on tenancies as well as on their own well-being.

Police and Housing can work together for 'three strikes' but why don't they get kids off the street; send them bush—that'd solve a lot of problems; and also work with the Drug & Alcohol groups. Idea of using the Rodeo Ground for kids—set up tents—a camp for boys to learn skills—like Boy Scouts. (Isa 8)

6.5 Strategies

The successful strategies outlined earlier under 'Formative and Sustaining' (6.3) need to be reiterated here as recommended ongoing practices. There is also a need here to incorporate selected 'Enabling' elements (from Section 6.4) to address those factors that are 'Corroding and Dissolving' the Recognition Space. Ideas for further ongoing strategies that would sustain and enable a housing tenancy recognition space in Mt Isa were also generated from a range of the survey questions. Question 20 asked 'What current / proposed programs could help tenants to follow the rules?' Question 21 asked front line housing workers 'Do you have any advice as to how good practices can be identified?' Note that this question was too difficult for most Housing Officers. One stated 'Difficult; no easy answer; how do you gauge interaction with staff [but you] can see they [tenants] want to engage with you about tenancy issues' (Isa 13). Two officers reverted to a critique of existing controversial rules (e.g. three strikes, eligibility income rules). One said 'how to change the house values?' and asked 'Are people doing it because they're being forced to?' (Isa 4).

Set out below are a set of 12 recommended strategies to maintain and improve the quality of the recognition space:

1. Overcoming disparities of views in the recognition space

It is recommended that the disparity in the recognition space concerning the differences and diversities in the perceptions of what the rules were purposely intending to achieve, should be addressed in an Area Officer workshop so that a unified and clear mission statement can be presented to tenants by the Housing Officers. The collective goals of the Area Office service as adapted for local conditions from the Head Office or official departmental goals need to be clearly articulated.

Opportunities for effective communication during day-to-day practice also need to be seized upon by housing staff, so as to prevent perceived imbalances in

responsibilities and reciprocities arising between Housing Officers and tenants. One such issue is that of R&M budgets, their limitations, time frames and responsibilities (current contractors).

2. Maintenance of a flexible approach to housing management

Flexibility needs to be maintained in the practice of Housing Officers to enable adaption to the transforming imposed conditionalities in resolving local tenancy problems in accordance with the realities of regional socio-economic parameters. Current flexible practices need to be maintained, such as the initiatives to stabilise tenancies through their vulnerable peak times of high visitation by relatives from the outer region; and the flexible approach to accruement of advance rental payments. Also the service provided to encourage tenants to seek help from Housing Officers in coercing their visitors to leave when they have outworn their welcome, but are unable to implement themselves due to the need to be seen to be respecting their kin.

3. Use of informal Aboriginal social capital

It is recommended that the Housing Office foster opportunities to capitalise on the value of kinship and extended family relationships in providing residential support, a significant form of Aboriginal social capital. Also to foster any opportunities for the role of Elders who could support conditionality and housing aims (despite the demise of their wider influence); also those younger tenants in their middle age who promise to become 'middle leaders' in the Aboriginal community.

It is recommended DHPW persist with attempts for 'community' and tenants' meetings to discuss tenancy issues. An alternative to regular meetings is the idea of having nominated Aboriginal leaders to represent all tenants in some sort of advocacy role. The idea of identifying successful tenants as role models to help build tenant leadership capacity was mentioned by one Housing Officer: 'In Pioneer a male tenant was put in a house as a role model; he had an apprenticeship' (Isa 4). An emphasis on the social capital approach could also lead to a neighbourhood watch ideology amongst tenants. For example, take the case of looking after empty houses:

> There are funerals every week in this town. Sometimes a funeral can go over a month (as in the Territory). People then leave their houses here. Housing [Department] should be bringing out a new rule about when you go away; somebody needs to check your house. That way there'd be no damage. Police, neighbours could be saving Housing money by watching. So you gotta love your neighbours and get on with them. (Isa 8)

4. Communication strategy to improve the agency of all key parties

Housing Officers need to be reflexive about the style of verbal communication that they use with tenants, with a need for use of appropriate plain English, a caring and respectful approach, being a practiced listener and refraining from a condescending style. A number of tenants emphasised the traditional Aboriginal value of mutual 'respect' as a necessary feature of the recognition space.

> Staff being approachable is important and prepared to sit down, listen and help to resolve [problems], listening to their stories. We're human. (Isa 13)

A cultural training and advisory service for Housing Officers on communication issues could be considered. As mentioned earlier, improved understandings of how traditional values may be adapted through processes of cultural change to contemporary housing tenancy contexts is also a topic that could be unpacked in a workshop for Housing Officers.

During this project, positive discussions were held with Housing Officers about further prospects for recognition. These included culturally appropriate yard landscaping, home-making programs, recognising the significance of matriarch householders, preferred sleeping group protocols in Aboriginal households, understanding vulnerability of junior householders, need for householder skills transfer and social network support; also improved understandings of hub households and their dynamics and tenant placement strategies. These could all be developed into some sort of Strategic Action Plan through facilitation in workshops.

A number of tenants conceded in their interviews that they need improved understandings of conditionality. This was indicated in the response of Isa 15: 'tenants need to understand the rules more so that they can follow them [and] we need someone in Housing to interpret'. A significant number of tenants emphasised the need for more information on the rules (e.g. Isa 7, 14, 15, 26, 27).

> Should be a notice on a plaque on the wall—listing the serious rules out. [For example] see the A.P. Centre—they have notices up everywhere, so the workers can read out rules to people. (Isa 26)

When Housing Officers were asked 'What could Housing frontline workers do to make it more easier to follow the rules?' (Q.13), a key strategy suggested by all was increased education with improved communication on conditionality.

> Education and explaining the rules—fact sheets are not very effective, because 60 per cent of tenants can't read or understand. We have been talking to them from March, that is before the July start of 'three strikes'. Talking to them is more effective than rules on paper. (Isa 1)

> DHPW provides education on the rules; currently through pamphlets, community meetings, mail-outs, info through Q gaps.[4] I don't think there is enough—individual officers could do more. (Isa 3)

> Community leaders and other authority figures could be incorporated into DHPW's education programs. (Isa 3)

> Talk to tenants on what can work for them for example how the policy that's stated in forms can work—and done with simple explanations. (Isa 5)

> Our fact sheets are not like mainstream—they're easier to read; [but] most of our work, 90 per cent, is face-to-face to overcome communication problems. It's all new [the tenancy rules] in the last three years that they've had to come to terms with. (Isa 13)

There is therefore a general view amongst Housing Officers that face-to-face contact is preferable. It is recommended that Housing Office management encourage opportunities for Housing Officers to sit down and talk through tenancy issues in order to find equitable solutions in the recognition space, as being preferred to simply handing out written educational materials such as fact sheets (these could nevertheless be used during such discussions).

The request for the transferral of conditionality information on a face-to-face basis recurred amongst tenant comments. For example, Isa 17 requested that '… more interaction takes place between Housing and tenant', and that 'if two people can no longer live together, Housing needs to assist both people' (Isa 17). However, several Housing Officers (Isa 3, 4) pointed out their time limitations to engage with tenants,

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[4] Department Communities Child Safety & Disabilities services Queensland –Annual report 2011–12 Government Agent Program (QGAP). There are 78 QGAPs in regional locations across Queensland that provide information about government services for people in their local community.

even though they agreed that one-on-one verbal communication was the best approach. The case for a one-on-one service by Housing Officers was also emphasised in relation to specific rules. In relation to aligning tenancy rules and employment, tenants stated:

> They want you to look for a job, but if you look for a job and get money then you lose your house; this should be talked about! (Isa 7)

Isa 9 also spoke of the need to get more information on tenancy rules.

> If I get work, there's a problem. [For example] One of my family came today and she said that she might have to move out of her DOH house because her partner was earning too much now [in the mines]. I told her to phone head office [DOH] in Brisbane. (Isa 9)

One Housing Officer described this problem as follows.

> There is a lack of help from IBA to help saving for deposit. Yet pre-payment must be out of salary. [Agrees that] people knock back job offer to keep their [rental] house. It's a dilemma. Tenants need more time to save for a house. We shouldn't kick them out straight away. Need a higher rent scheme to lead to home ownership. A net to catch them. (Isa 4)

The desirability of more Aboriginal staff in the Housing Office to assist with communication is practically and equitability arguable, notwithstanding the difficulty that Indigenous staff may have implementing housing conditionalities due to their familial and kinship relations. Clearly, non-Indigenous local staff are committed to their work, which they perform professionally. But the voices of the tenants suggest some Aboriginal staff should be present. Thus Isa 10 stated 'need good brainy Aboriginal people in Housing—it's mainly white people at present, [but] white people don't know you …' (Isa 10).

At the completion of this report (late 2015), the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre had once again built up a complement of Indigenous staff whose roles were to focus on tenant support services whilst the non-Aboriginal staff were carrying out the tenancy compliance measures.

5. *The generation of social capital in the recognition space through inter-agency and tenants' meetings*

It is recommended to maintain the clearly formative and sustaining process of Integrated Case Management (ICM) meetings, including participation of Aboriginal staff who provide a strong voice and some advocacy for tenants; Also to maintain the practice of Housing Officers obtaining coordinated help from other agencies for needy tenants.

One tenant said they would like to see a 'group in Housing to concentrate on supporting tenancies for example, the younger generation who have not had the experience of discipline', but this person also spoke of broader forms of support:

> Drug/alcohol mob too—all organisations have to talk and work together. Really would like training for certain needs for example, I see a husband here walking on his own, I know that counselling is needed. Sometimes they've gotta change—like a sacrifice. Or a woman who has been bashed—I take them in; give a little food—live a day at a time. (Isa 8)

The interconnection of housing management with the wide range of social problems was raised by another tenant as an opportunity for the application of Aboriginal social capital.

One issue: surveillance of people in houses re drugs, alcohol, misbehaviour … not doing enough, to endorse laws to protect housing. Need more Aboriginal people going around as house minders and helping with problems—school attendance, getting food on table, helping with assaults, DV, criminal etc. Need extra Aboriginal staff in Housing. (Isa 20)

Similarly, Isa 28 referred to broader forms of support for people with multiple problems: 'Get up and help people; support people who have nothing—people when they are down' (Isa 28).

It is recommended that the budget to facilitate housing tenancy meetings in rural towns be re-instigated as requested by the Housing Officers, (now that the state government has changed), and arrangements sought to identify suitable low-cost venues to meet with local tenants (e.g. Community Hall in Camooweal).

One tenant proposed a more formal Aboriginal advisory structure:

Have an Aboriginal Advisory Board for Department of Housing from whole region incl. Normanton, Cloncurry, Burketown, Karumba, Dajarra, Camooweal, Julia Creek, etc. And to include several Aboriginal companies [like Rainbow Gateway/Myuma] through the work-for-dole rules coming; to fix up housing. T.O.'s and Native Title holders in NWQ and Gulf to sign an ILUA for new houses; a first house loan (IBA Plan) to build houses on own land. Form Home Owners Co-op. Get team leaders. Prop up Jimberella with money instead of whitefeller contractors coming in from out of region. (Isa 20)

6. Jimaylya as a focus for tenancy support

It is recommended to maintain the role of the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre in providing a critically important role in opening up and generating the recognition space. One tenant's suggestion (Isa 6) was to make better use of Jimaylya for housing tenancy meetings, particularly for past Jimaylya clients where they could be asked 'how they are going' and discuss their problems.

Other recent recommendations for service enhancements in the Jimaylya Centre are:

→ manually-oriented TAFE programs (with suitable infrastructure) to stimulate the residents

→ a carefully designed emotional and well-being program to identify and treat deep-seated cases of spiritual homelessness

→ a tracking program for clients into mainstream rental housing to see what extra social supports they may need to maintain a moderate drinking culture, a stable tenancy and prevent recycling back into homelessness (Memmott & Nash 2012, p.37).

7. Educational support programs on home skills and parenting

A number of tenants conceded their need for house skills training. Isa 8 said 'A lot [of people] can't budget; don't know how to do shopping and have bad habits and waste money on different things'. One Housing Officer conceded the lack of available programs, saying 'no tenancy programs as such; with the only client contact from us [DHPW] and Centacare' (Isa 1), implying one-on-one non-structured dissemination of information was the central method.

Places like Centacare have tried to initiate a 'start up' pack like a cleaning pack (another educational initiative). Case-management advice and information. We go through it with the tenant too; the rights and responsibilities of the tenant. Quarter hour video clips were once used by 'Tenancy Advice

and Advocacy' but the funding stopped … These videos should be brought up to date. (Isa 1)

Only one tenant acknowledged doing the 'Centacare programs if behind in rent; if registered with them' (Isa 21). Housing Officers were aware of the availability of some limited programs, 'like Indigenous parenting' (Isa 1), or 'Pride in my Home' initiative, which supplied cleaning products to new tenants. Another Housing Officer spoke of the need as follows:

> Hope to see a program teaching people to look after home and doing cooking and cleaning. They may never have been taught this stuff. And trying to teach kids respect for the house such as kids swinging on cupboard doors. A Parenting program; but need it to be an outreach program. (Isa 5)

Similarly, Isa 1 outlined a similar proposal:

> A living skills course is needed. Tenants would benefit massively. It's the biggest thing that causes people to be evicted—not keeping clean. Centacare is the 'middle man' [whom] they go to for help—they could run such a course; to educate tenants before they get in their house. The ISD (Indigenous Service Delivery) unit were working on this, but we need locals, preferably an Aboriginal woman to teach such a course. (Isa 1)

The tenants who were interviewed agreed there was very little on offer in Mt Isa and put forward a range of suggestions for courses they would like to do, such as 'Life Skills'; 'Living in a house'; 'Healthy Living' (Isa 15), 'Hygiene' (Isa 17); 'Triple p parenting for men and women', 'eating healthy', ' child safety', 'budgeting course' (Isa 19); 'Closing the Gap program and survival in the 21st Century' (Isa 20); 'ATODs' (Isa 25); 'Everyday living skills such as cooking' (Isa 27); 'Art and painting' ('to reduce their problems and keep them off the drink and off the streets') (Isa 28); 'moving in to a new home such as transport, car' (Isa 29); 'budgeting, money, and eating the right food' (Isa 30).

A tenant who was a renal patient requested a program to instruct 'others in [her] house to understand what I can/can't do in home such as heavy lifting' (Isa 18). One interviewee requested a course to be held at their place, not a course somewhere else that is home-based training (Isa 17).

8. Recognition of externally oriented behaviour as an aspect of Aboriginal lifestyle and appropriate design for such

One of the range of Aboriginal behaviours that at times create a clash and a potential 'non-recognition space' in their tenancy dealings, is that of their propensity for outdoor living around the house rather than in the house, so typical of their home communities for example see Long (2005) and Godwin (2014) for Dajarra; Memmott (1979) and Dalley (2012) for Gununa. As noted earlier, a number of interviewees mentioned conflict with authorities over social gatherings in their yards and cooking bush foods in their yards. The author has also recorded neighbours making complaints about sleeping on verandas and yards. All of these behaviours derive from traditional Aboriginal lifestyles and continue unchallenged in their own 'home' communities whether it be a rural town (Dajarra), a pastoral station settlement (Alpurrurulam), or a former Mission settlement (Gununa). Thus one tenant said that 'when friends from Dajarra bring goanna, turkey, we need to cook it in a screened area in the backyard' (Isa 10).

DHPW could thus support the tenants in creating more environmentally appropriate external living spaces. As recommended by several tenants (Isa2,9) house yards should be designed with an outdoor living (or deck) area and be equipped with an

external hearth facility for winter time—'a wood stove or a fire drum outside' (Isa 9). One Senior Housing Officer confirmed that if there was a grill over a hearth, where one could cook, it was deemed not to be an open-fire and hence permissible to construct and keep under fire regulations (A.W. 31 July 2013).

> On the safety side, not issued with a fire extinguisher. That could happen. Housing don't have fire extinguishers, but we should have one. Not allowed to build a barbeque without permission. (Isa 26)

A number of recommendations were made by tenants (Isa 16, 22) concerning assistance with yard maintenance, such as 'how to grow garden; help with equipment, mowers, whipper snipper etc.' (Isa 16).

The proposition of adapting existing houses for externally-oriented living with verandas, cooking areas etc. is one that could be connected to the Myuma R&M/construction team initiatives (see later).

9. Sustainable yard landscaping strategy

A second more environmentally appropriate design feature for external lifestyle would be an 'arid landscaping' design approach. The continual impact of drought and water restrictions in Mt Isa has a profound impact on the capacity to maintain conventional Australian gardens or lawns, a phenomenon that is likely to be exacerbated by climate change long into the future. Water rates are high and it is expensive to keep conventional lawn watered and growing in Mt Isa (A.W. 31 July 2013). The Senior Manager of DHPW in Mt Isa recognises that there is a sustainability issue around water, not to mention the cost of mowers, which is often out of the economic capacity of tenants (B.S. 25 May 2013). This highlights the need to develop alternative arid zone landscaping solutions for the many current bare-earth yards in Mt Isa, combined with the need to provide shaded areas for externally oriented lifestyles. A complementary problem is the cost of electricity for increased air-conditioning, which could be offset by shaded outdoor activity spaces.

Successful 'Best Kept Yard' competitions with prize money were held by DHPW at a number of towns and it is suggested one could be held for the 'Best Yard with low water requirement'.

10. Pioneer urban planning strategy

A Senior Housing Office requested a new Strategy for Pioneer in early 2012 and said they wanted ideas:

> There's something we're missing and maybe could do better with tenant families. Staff have been under much stress working hard in Pioneer; we're exhausted now. We do not have the capacity to be out there all the time. Problems to houses and tenancies are being caused by gangs of kids on the streets, not the tenant families themselves. Mt Isa Office has run out of R and M money fixing up Pioneer houses, which is now impacting adversely on wider tenancies in Mt Isa as we don't have funds to fix up their houses—this is upsetting many good tenants. (A.W. 6 March 2012)

Reducing the excessively high density of Aboriginal rental tenants in Pioneer was recognised by some tenants as a necessary strategy for the government to pursue.

> Housing should split everybody up. This is the only area in Mt Isa that has a lot of dramas, big fights. I have stayed in a few different suburbs but always end up back up in this area; I'm not happy with location. (Isa 21)

> A Pioneer Strategy is in draft [and] density looked at—need to spread out [like Logan]. (Isa 2)

At the time of writing, a reduction of the Aboriginal rental housing density in Pioneer by DHPW was in progress through sale of selected vacated houses, but was a slow process.

11. Maintain Myuma and DHPW/TAFE/BAS collaborative initiatives and promote home ownership

It is recommended to maintain and foster the innovative economic venture implemented between the Housing Office, the local TAFE, the BAS and the Myuma Group (Rainbow Gateway), to train local Aboriginal adults to carry out housing R&M. Myuma's ultimate aim is that the Aboriginal workers, if stable employees in this enterprise, will have an option to buy one of the rental stock houses. As only two interviewed tenants (Isa 15, 27) spoke of the need for program assistance 'to own your own home', this initiative presents the best currently available path to explore a way forward for Aboriginal home ownership in Mt Isa. In keeping with this idea one Housing Officer advocated for an option for 'Sale of House to Tenant' as being desirable (Isa 2).

The collaborative initiative is in keeping with Isa 20 who recommended strategies to 'increase Indigenous employment. For example, on the front desk, doing house R&M including mowing lawns, building new houses, landscaping yards; and use unemployed people to improve houses—planting more shade trees in places like Camooweal. Queensland Housing contractors come from east coast or down south' (Isa 20).

12. Create more diversity of housing stock

A number of tenants (Isa 8, 17, 20, 21, 30) emphasised the need for more housing stock in Mt Isa to suit large extended families as well as for special needs groups.

> … need more for single men, single women, medical accommodation especially dialysis unit here for dialysis patients from the outer region [Mornington Island, Doomadgee, Lake Nash]. (Isa 20)

Isa 21 (a single mother with many children) said:

> Build more large houses and spread Indigenous people out. A lot of Indigenous families are very large, and are not eligible to go into a Shelter, cause family too large; and if they go in, they have to pay for two rooms, but we can't afford. We were staying [sleeping] in our car. Then Centacare got us an Emergency House. Went to Rocky and Winton but can't overcrowd relatives for too long, have to move on. (Isa 21)

> Only you got a house with three bedroom—that was my generation. But now some mothers have eight kids—not enough rooms; need five bedrooms plus! Need bigger houses to be built … (Isa 8)

The proportional lack of large houses in the Mt Isa rental stock was also well flagged as an issue by staff in the Area Office. However, procuring such stock was restricted by lack of capital budget until existing stock could be sold (as in Pioneer). Nevertheless, a vision for the Myuma building teams could be for the renovation and extension of some existing houses to offset this problem to some degree.

The 12 recommendations of this report can therefore be summarised under the following headings:

1. Overcoming disparities of views in the recognition space

2. Maintenance of a flexible approach to housing management

3. Use of informal Aboriginal social capital

4. Communication strategy to improve the agency of all key parties

5. The generation of social capital in the recognition space through inter-agency and tenants' meetings

6. Jimaylya as a focus for tenancy support

7. Educational support programs on home skills and parenting

8. Recognition of externally oriented behaviour as an aspect of Aboriginal lifestyle and appropriate design for such

9. Sustainable yard landscaping strategy

10. Pioneer urban planning strategy

11. Maintain Myuma and DHPW collaborative initiatives and promote home ownership

12. Create more diversity of housing stock.

7   CONCLUSIONS

The Mt Isa case study report focuses on the housing conditionality, lifeworlds and policy outcomes for Indigenous social housing tenants in a remote, urban location. The primary aim of the Mt Isa IMYRP case study was to explore the perspectives of Indigenous social housing tenants, government and intermediary organisations in relation to housing conditionalities, in order to identify good practice and policy principles that promote positive housing outcomes. A total of 30 in-depth structured interviews were completed, six with state government Housing Officers in the Mt Isa Housing Service Centre of DHPW, and 24 with Aboriginal tenants who were all in, or waiting to go into, state government rental social housing.

Our findings suggested that there were some significant constraints and enabling influences on the recognition space. In particular, the lack of available and affordable housing in Mt Isa was critical to the success of service delivery to the most vulnerable tenants. Furthermore, the 'three strikes' policy had started in DHPW just prior to the commencement of the project, and a degree of frustration existed amongst DHPW staff and tenants about the changing policy landscape and its implications. On the other hand, the attempts at a flexible tenancy management approach by DHOs and the enabling impacts of informal Aboriginal social capital should not be underestimated.

7.1   Tenant perspectives

Aboriginal tenants who were having the most difficulty with achieving or sustaining tenancies in government housing were disadvantaged due to lack of education, employment and constraints within their social behaviour, including obligations to visiting kin. Most interviewees were recipients of welfare payments, and without jobs and other forms of social capital, they had little opportunity to move out of their current rental housing. Opportunities were further curtailed by the much higher and fixed-price private rentals in the two-speed Mt Isa economy. Home ownership was not a strong or even moderate theme in responses.

The frequency and volume of Aboriginal visitors as a result of migration and circular mobility in Mt Isa from regional and remote communities is linked to many social problems in the town. Most tenants considered the rules were getting 'tighter', and that the most difficult to meet related to the ASB of their visitors, both in terms of excessive unapproved numbers and engaging in anti-social behaviour which violated the rules. More than half of the tenants referred to the Aboriginal custom of taking in visitors as a necessary and unavoidable cultural responsibility. However, most tenants were of the view that family members were helping with meeting the housing rules indicating a significant degree of social capital.

Tenant agency was expressed in several important ways. For some, especially those who came through the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre, the first need of their self-agency was to reform their own lifestyles to achieve their well-being goals. A substantial number of tenants perceived housing to be essential to achieve their lifeworld goals around the well-being of their children. A number also emphasised the role of housing in conjunction with their ability to achieve a sense of independence, stability and/or peace for their households.

High variability between tenant contexts means that no one rule system can be said to be highly successful or non-successful—rather, there are mixed responses and impacts. This necessitates flexibility in housing management approach.

7.2   Housing Officers perspectives

The six Housing Officers were unanimous that the rules of housing conditionality were getting tighter, (as were 18 of the 24 tenants). They were all of the view that they were helping tenants meet the housing rules.

A serious constraint was the state of neighbourhood crowding (notwithstanding household crowding) in the suburb of Pioneer, characterised by a relatively high density of rental housing occupied by Aboriginal people exacerbated by high visitation numbers, family violence, alcohol-fuelled behaviour and forms of anti-social street behaviour impinging on and de-stabilising tenancies. Nevertheless, the suburb of Pioneer was a site of high Aboriginal social capital, but also a site where social capital was abused and violated when intoxicated people took advantage of the norms of tenant hospitality. Staff had implemented various interventions to increase house pride. However Aboriginal people in Pioneer sometimes accused them of putting too many people in the suburb. Some tenants with children were attempting to avoid placement in Pioneer or trying to move elsewhere.

The agency of Housing Officers was critical in determining how well the rules were working for tenants and proved to be an enabling influence at times. While the majority of Indigenous tenants tried to abide by the rules, many require individual supports; for example need for critical information on rules and practical advice, such as on cleaning services. The Officers saw this as a communication strategy too, understanding that it can be an effective way to build trust between tenants and government. Agency of Housing Officers was demonstrated in their moving of tenants to dismantle social conflicts and family violence, and in initiating a number of strategies to support tenants during key periods when their visitor numbers peaked and their tenancies thereby become vulnerable. Housing Officers all recognised flexibility as a key principle in interpreting and applying the rules of tenancy.

During the early period of the IMYRP project in Mt Isa, social capital was building between various government and non-government agencies (e.g. at ICM meetings), seeking solutions for clients by conscripting assistance from or referring to other agencies. Within these networks, the presence of local Aboriginal staff in other agencies provided powerful voices in the recognition space. Lack of Aboriginal DHOs in Mt Isa may be an important area for developing more effective tenant-management relationships.

7.3   Intermediary organisation perspectives

The number and capacity of Indigenous organisations in Mt Isa has become limited and there was no dedicated Indigenous housing management organisation operating effectively at the time of our study.

However, the Jimaylya Centre presents a special case due to its internal Indigenous management and staffing, that persuades us to deal with it as an ICHO. Jimaylya provides homeless people with safe shelter, a managed drinking program, training in positive tenancy behaviour and then accommodation leading to housing, as well as the building of social capital and resilience. Organisational constraints for Jimaylya include the lack of available rental housing for clients ready to transit out and a proportion of clients who 'fall through the cracks', 'recycling' through homelessness again and back into the Centre. The agency of the Jimaylya staff involves implementing techniques to achieve outreach to homeless clients, as well as the post-Jimaylya services of visiting and counselling clients. The capacity of the Jimaylya Centre to influence its clients through behavioural change to their lifestyles and the

gaining of knowledge on housing conditionality are important positive services in the Mt Isa housing sector.

At the conclusion of our IMYRP project, a new Indigenous corporation, the Myuma Group (through its Rainbow Gateway Limited), was commencing engagement in the Mt Isa housing environment through its innovative collaborative partnership with QHPW. It has most recently commenced providing an R&M service for DHPW stock in Mt Isa, with an intention to extend into the rural towns of NWQ. This recent pro-active engagement by the Myuma Group, forging a new partnership with DHPW and TAFE, will bring a new chapter in Aboriginal housing management after the demise of many of the old Housing Co-ops that were established in the last century.

As our findings suggest, there is a disjunction not only between the views within the Mt Isa HSC but also amongst Indigenous social housing tenants about the tenancy rules and their implementation. At the same time, the DHOs and the tenants recognised ways in which communication can be enhanced that draw on the knowledge and goodwill of DHOs and the agency of Indigenous tenants. It is also clear that the most effective engagement will involve the acknowledgement of the many issues relating to Indigenous disadvantage, not only housing needs. With this understanding it seems that collaboration between the DHPW and two local Indigenous entities (the Jimaylya Centre and Myuma) at the time of this study is leading the way towards an enhanced recognition space. Based on the findings, the report sets out 12 recommendations that are critical for achieving the most effective housing outcomes for Indigenous people in the Mt Isa region.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Generic research prompts

Current Rules

1. What are the rules that you/tenants have to follow for your/their house? (Code)

(Paying rent; number of people who can live in the house; visitors and how long they can stay; rules about making noise; damage to the house; keeping the yard clean)

2. What is the intended purpose/objective of each of these rules? (Code)

(This is a difficult question and not easily answered by either Housing Officers or tenants).

3. Is each of the rules working? [elicit each one] (Stop/Continue/Change)

Difficulty of rules

4. Are these rules getting tighter or slacking off (weaker)? (Tighter/same/weaker)

5. What rules are the most difficult for you/tenants to meet? (Elicit)

6. Do your/tenants ways of living / practices run up against these housing rules? (Yes/No, then Which?)

7. Which of these practices are allowed in Aboriginal culture? (Elicit and tick)

OR What Aboriginal people think is OK, but government people do not.

8. Should the rules respect Aboriginal ways of living, or should Aboriginal ways of living change to meet the rules? (Respect / Change / Compromise)

Helping with rules

9. Are family members helping with meeting the housing rules? (Yes/No, then How?)

10. Are community leaders helping with meeting the housing rules? [and elicit identity of community leaders] (Yes/No, then How?)

11. Are frontline workers within housing organisations helping with meeting the housing rules? (Yes/No, then How?)

12. Are frontline workers with government housing departments (or their agents) helping with the meeting housing rules? (Yes/No, then How?)

13. What could community leaders/family/housing frontline workers do to make it more easier to follow the rules? [select which agency is relevant to interviewees] (Code)

14. What is the housing department/agent trying to get to happen/achieve? (Record)

15. What is the Indigenous housing organisation trying to get to happen/achieve? (Record)

16. What is the housing tenant trying to get to happen/achieve? (Record)

Good practice

17. Can you describe situations where tenants, leaders, housing orgs and governments reached a shared understanding / working well together in running the rules? (Elicit and tick)

18. If you can get that, how can it be maintained (given the likely changes in policies and politics)? (Code)

19. What community strengths could help people to follow the rules? (Code)

20. What current / proposed programs could help tenants to follow the rules? (Elicit and tick)

21. Do you have any advice as to how can good practices be identified? [for agency/dept. Ask for examples] (Code) N.B. This question is too difficult for most Housing Officers.

OR: Do you have any good ideas to tell Housing—how they can do their job better and make your house life better? [for tenant]

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